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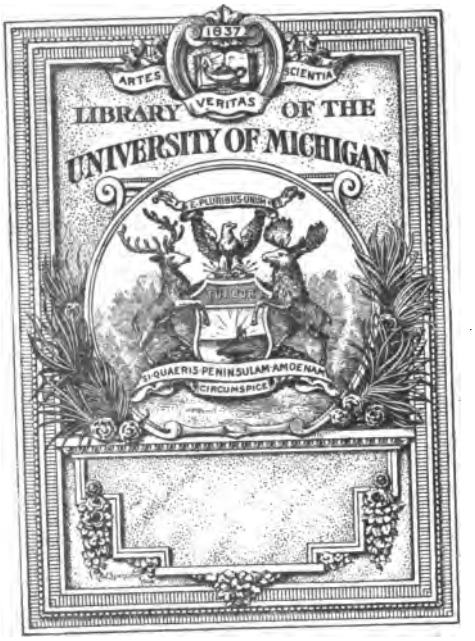
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AN

INQUIRY

INTO THE

NATURE AND EXTENT

OF

POETICK LICENCE.

39114

By N. A. VIGORS, jun. Esq.

Μηδε ἡμεις ουν την ποιητικην ἡμεριδα των μυθων εκκοπτωμεν, μηδ' αφανιζωμεν· αλλ' ὁπυ μεν ὑφ ἡδονης ακρατυ προς δοξαν αυθαδως θραυνομενον εξυβριζει και ὑλομανει το μυθωδες αυτης και θηατρικον, επιλαμβανομενοι κολυωμεν και πιεζωμεν· ὁπυ δε ἁπλειται τινος μυθης τῃ χαριτι, και το γλυκυ τυ λογυ και αγωγον, υκ ακαρπον εστιν, υδε κενον, ενταυθα φιλοσοφιαν εισαγωμεν και καταμιγνυωμεν. PLUT. de audiend. Poet.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. MACKINLAY, 87, STRAND,

BY T. BENSLEY, BOLT COURT, FLEET STREET.

1810.

INTRODUCTION.

Among the works of invention, which are intended to promote the convenience, or increase the elegancies of society, the compositions of the Fine Arts are distinguished by a marked peculiarity in their end and execution. As they are directed to the object of contributing to the gratification, not of administering to the necessities of mankind, they seem, by their nature, to claim an exemption from that exactness and regularity of representation, which characterize the works of mere utility. Pursuing thus a peculiar end, they have been indulged in peculiar immunities; and to such an extent has the right of their professors to these exclusive privileges been acknowledged, that they have been allowed to heighten their delineations by such adscititious or imaginary embellishment, as, lying beyond the boundaries of nature and reality, appear more calculated to awaken our interest, or add to our delight.

But among the arts, thus privileged by universal suffrage, poetry not only stands the first in point of rank, but preserves this elevation in nearly the same degree of superiority, as their productions surpass the inferiour works of invention. The powers by which the less exalted of these sister arts excite the emotions of taste, are nearly limited to the use they are enabled to make of material objects; they may be almost said to find their verge terminate where there is no beauty or sublimity of colour, sound, or form. But not only all the sublimity and beauty of matter, but of mind, come under the poet's controul; he not only raises a new creation more novel, more fanciful, and more perfect than exists any where in reality; he not only animates his scenery with characters, but informs his characters with sentiments, and endows them with language suitable to their ideal existence. Indeed poetry in its imagery, excels the other fine arts, not merely in the same degree that the intellectual world excels the corporeal: the power of a poet over his materials is nothing less than enchantment; he can as easily transfer the property of one object to another, as substitute one object for another; he can animate

matter into mind, and invest mind with the form and properties of matter.

On carrying up our inquiries into the nature of so extraordinary and considerable a portion of the materials of a poet to the source, and investigating the sentiments of the ancients on the subject before us, their opinions are found deserving of notice, more from the partiality which they have manifested towards this licentiousness in composition, than from the success which they have evinced in justifying or explaining it. In undertaking to account for those bolder effusions of the art, which they regarded as soaring too high for the controul of reason, or trammels of precept, they pronounced them to be the effects of a divine phrensy. Under this idea, which was no small favourite with antiquity, the votarist of the muse was feigned to receive by inspiration those sublime conceptions, which he imbibed with so much warmth, and delivered with so much enthusiasm. In vain did he, who was not thus favoured by heaven, endeavour to regulate his essays by art, or by labour; all his attempts must prove cold and lifeless, until animated with that effluence which could descend from the muse alone. While he

who received the divinity in the moments when she was propitious, and wrote under her immediate inspiration, possessed the right of giving utterance to her dictates, how little conformable soever they might be found to the more rigid principles of criticism.

From the force of these descriptions of poetical enthusiasm, much it is to be remarked should be subducted, and attributed to the extravagance of declamatory exaggeration. There is evidently displayed under the tissue of figurative language, an ambitious attempt at raising the description to the height of the subject described, and at accommodating it to the elevation of poetical expression. To a certain degree however they may be admitted; for they do not appear so difficult to be reconciled, as may be at first imagined, with notions which are at present very generally allowed. Few persons, it is presumed, will be found to deny the existence of that talent or aptitude for excelling in any of the arts of design, which we term genius; which, though capable of improvement or deterioration, is a natural endowment dispensed by the same Power which has bestowed on us our grosser organs. As few, it is presumed,

will be found to deny that it is to those persons alone, on whom this faculty is bestowed, that those happy irregularities of conception or execution, which we tolerate as licences, will be likely to occur. While they who are accustomed to attend to the motions of their minds, must have observed that there are propitious moments, when, from the accidental presentation of external objects to the senses, or the fortuitous recurrence of ideas previously acquired by sensation, those happy combinations of imagery arise, which cannot be created at pleasure.

But of these opinions of the ancients, even with the aid of this explanation, little use can be made in elucidating the nature of those licences of poetry which it is the purpose of these inquiries to investigate. They give the matter under discussion a dependance upon a mental faculty which is probably as inscrutable in its nature and movements, and as difficult to be brought within ascertainable limits, as these licences themselves. And surely if poetical genius or enthusiasm is of a nature which is difficult to be determined, much more difficult must it be to ascertain those effusions to which it gives birth, which are of themselves capable of an endless modification.

Neither does modern criticism afford us much greater assistance in entering on these inquiries. Though various writers have touched on the subject, and have sheltered many seeming anomalies in poetry, under the general term licence, yet they have no where defined with accuracy what the term signifies. Many expressions occur in the works both of poets and criticks, which infer the existence of such a principle in poetry as certain and acknowledged: some few passages might be pointed out, where a description of its nature is cursorily attempted, and others where bounds are partially prescribed to its power. But in the only attempts wherein they have undertaken to define its nature, they are found either to give too great a latitude to its meaning, or to circumscribe it within too narrow limits. The former seems to be the case, where poetick licence is described as being that particular character which distinguishes and sets bounds between poetry and mere prose:[a] for to

[a] Mr. Dryden thus defines this term, "Poetical licence I take to be the liberty which poets have assumed to themselves, in all ages, of speaking things in verse, which are beyond the severity of prose. It is that particular character which distinguishes and sets the bounds betwixt *oratio soluta* and poetry."

Pref. to State of Innoc.

select a single instance, verse, which constitutes an essential difference between both kinds of composition, is not in any respect of a licentious character, however included in this description. And on the other hand, those attempts at illustrating its nature, must be at once pronounced too confined in their application, which would straighten it (as is the case in some few tracts[b] written expressly on the subject,) to the immunities of mere poetical diction.

From the insufficiency of these attempts, it is of course still necessary that some effort should be made to complete the definition of the terms under consideration. And in order to arrive at one more just and comprehensive, it is expedient to make a few preliminary observations; which, if they do not appear wholly adequate to the end of their application, will at least afford some assistance in arranging the scattered members of poetry, and thus bringing within the bounds of comprehension an art so apparently unlimited in its nature and varied in its appearance.

[b] See particularly Christ. Ware, Senar. sine de Leg. et Licent. Vet. Poetar.

The study of human nature, in which every poet should be read, is merely a contexture of different sciences. Every thing which regards man's state and situation, either has been made, or is capable of becoming the subject of such learned or philosophical investigation. To History is committed the perpetuation of his achievements in the more active and splendid scenes of life. The circumstances not only of his nature and existence, but of those inferiour beings, and of that inanimate world, which becomes considerable from being connected with him, supply Natural History with its various speculations. From the varieties in his manners, his conduct, and his opinions, Ethicks derive their matter of discussion. The peculiarities of his language give to Grammar, and Rhetorick their scope and origin. And to Criticism is consigned the regulation of those finer productions of the art, which furnish his taste with the means of elegant gratification.

That each of these sciences enter the composition of poetry, is a truth so evident, as to need no proof in order to be admitted. And he who would succeed in this art, must not only have his observation considerably

exercised in the different subjects of their investigation, but must have reduced his speculations in them under such general heads, as will give his thoughts the consistence and utility, which arise from system. He cannot hope, without being somewhat of a good historian, to succeed in those higher walks of his art, which take their subject from the oral or written annals of a nation. Without much of the skill and observation of a naturalist, his descriptions of rural scenery, and his delineation of life and manners, must be cold and uninteresting. That knowledge of the human heart and character, of the calm tenour of sentiment, and the warm ebullition of passion, which he is so frequently called upon to display, he must derive from the same study whence the moral philosopher constructs his system of ethicks. Over language in all the varieties of sense, structure, embellishment, and harmony, he must exercise the skill of a grammarian and a rhetorician. And he must complete his education in this circle of sciences, by acquiring a perfect insight into those critical rules by which his art is to be tried on the touchstone of excellence.

But though the poet is thus brought within the fence of science, he is not confined to the narrow limits of its circumference. By a certain felicity of boldness, which has ever been the undisputed right of his art, he may break down that pale which would set bounds to his prerogative. To the language of history he is not always obliged to pay a rigid attention; he may often give to past events, a turn which is more suitable to the elevation of his ideas; and may represent things, not as they happened, but as he conceives they might have happened. In his delineation of natural scenery, and pictures of human life and action, descriptions and characters may rise from his creation, different from what nature any where unfolds to contemplation. The language in which he speaks, is particularly distinguished from that which occurs in reality; but setting aside the circumstances of its consisting of verse, and figurative expression, those marked peculiarities which characterize the diction of a poet, he may fashion his language with a frequent disregard to the minuter rules of grammar. Criticism alone assumes the right of restraining the licentiousness of poetical

ardour; but even from its dogmas, he possesses a right of appeal to the judgment, and the feelings.

Science, therefore, appears to constitute a standard, from which the poet may be generally said to depart, in taking those liberties which are justified by licence. But that science is exclusively the standard from which he deviates, will be more admissible, on demonstrating the improbability of there being any other.

On a casual view of the subject under consideration, art and nature may be thought to possess an equal or paramount claim to that of science, in forming the standard from which the poet possesses a liberty of deviating in his delineations. From the rank which his compositions hold, as the principal among the arts of taste, the intimacy which they possess to the former, may be thought even closer than that which they bear to the latter. Nay, in regarding poetry as strictly imitative, in which is inferred the notion of an original and a model, which the artist aims at copying or emulating, each may be regarded as forming a standard, to which he must in some respects conform, and from which he may in others occasionally depart.

With a reference to this distinction, the licences of poetry may be conceived to be determinable; either as deviations from that state of things, abstractedly considered, which obtains in nature, or from that mode of practice which is generally observed in art, not less by the poet himself, than by such artists as imitate the same objects with him.

A single observation, however, will be sufficient to shew, that neither of these principles can be taken as the foundation of a theory which will be adequate to define or illustrate that subtle quality of composition which I have undertaken to investigate. One example will, in fact, sufficiently evince that some licence may be used where there is no deviation from any such standard; beyond which circumstance, we need not seek any additional proof of the insufficiency of the principle under consideration.

For let us suppose, as a possible case, that the poet has occasion to represent some fact which history describes as improbably atrocious and unnatural, and that suitably to what was likely to occur, he describes it as merciful or upright; it is evident that in thus misrepresenting a known circumstance, he takes a liberty with truth, which is only jus-

tifiable by licence; and yet in this process, so far may he be from deserting that standard which is assumed in the present hypothesis, that his conduct may be at once more conformable to nature, and more consistent with his general practice, as well as with that of every artist who may undertake to describe the same circumstance.

In a word, the apparent force of both hypotheses may be not merely explained away; but both may be reduced under the more comprehensive principle which was originally laid down, as being exposed to no similar objection. The fact is, that both art and nature may form constituent parts of science, the true standard by which every deviation is to be estimated which is admitted as a licence: for we have already seen, that what is generally prescribed in the former, gives rise to that system of rules, which constitute the laws of grammar and criticism; and that what generally obtains in the latter, furnishes history and physiology with their respective subjects. These sciences include no small portion of the materials of a poet; and it will probably be found, that it is only as each assumes a scientifick form, that it constitutes a standard, by which the liberties

taken in poetical delineation may be at all determined. Thus, however different the present principle may be thought from that which was fundamentally laid down as true, they are, in fact, identical. And this circumstance, by affording a striking evidence of the comprehensiveness of the theory which I commenced with establishing, since it includes one which is itself not narrow or circumscribed, appears to offer as decisive a proof as may be easily suggested, of the exclusive truth of the former.

If this conclusion may be now taken as established, we require little more in order to perfect the developement of the terms under consideration, than to point out the object by which a poet is led to deviate from what is true in science. And this may be done with sufficient precision, from a maxim advanced by Aristotle, in the close of his "Poeticks," where he undertakes the refutation of some charges urged against poets; and which, though it may not appear to designate the nature of licence, at least fully justifies its adoption, while at the same time it specifies the end which ought to be sought in every deviation from science. "The practice of the poet in feigning any thing," says

the critick,[c] " which is impossible according to science, is justified when he attains the specified end, of making the general effect of the composition itself, or any of its parts, more striking."

From these considerations, and from this authority, we may venture to define POETICK LICENCE as follows; That liberty whereby a poet, in order to render his compositions more striking, allowably deviates from what is considered true in science.

Although, for reasons which have been already specified, we are sufficiently justified in offering this definition as comprehensive and clear, it must be allowed, that in order to render it logically adequate, it is necessary to establish the converse of what is here advanced; and to shew, not merely that whatever is a deviation from science will be a licence, but that whatever is a licence will be a deviation from science. Even granting this object attained, we must proceed far beyond the limits of a definition, in order to accomplish all that is proposed in the present

[c] Πρωτον μεν γαρ, αν τα προς αυτην την τηχνην αδυνατα πεποιηται, ημαρτηται· αλλ' ορθως εχει, ει τυγχανει τω τελει τω αυτης. Το δε τελος ειρηται· οιον, ει ετως εκπληκτικωτερον η αυτο, η αλλο τοιε μερος. De Poet. § 46.

essay. As the standard is various and different, from which the poet claims a power of departing, the *nature* of those licences by which he assumes such a liberty must be very indefinitely marked out by a general reference to science; and as the quality of being *striking* is relative, and admits of a different modification, according to the several species of composition in which it is attained, it forms but a vague standard for determining *the extent* which may be tolerated in poetick licence.

The readiest expedient which offers for supplying these defects, and obviating these exceptions to the comprehensiveness of the subjoined investigation, seems to lie in a copious induction made with the express object of proving, that in every licence some scientifick truth is violated, and some striking effect attained. In prosecuting which, it will be attended with little comparative difficulty to examine how far every deviation may be prosecuted, without abusing the power by which it is tolerated.

That no objection may be raised to the induction on which I hope to ascertain these points, as partial or limited, it seems advisable to consider poetry in every light in

which it has been regarded by the comprehensive views of Aristotle. With this object, it is my intention to prosecute my inquiries into its licences through the various parts of quantity into which that great critick has divided the art; and to examine them with respect to the Fable, the Manners, the Sentiments, and the Diction.

Of these constituent parts of the higher poetry, the most considerable is the Fable, as Aristotle has justly decided: this part shall consequently be made the subject of primary discussion. As it has been defined by the critick, it is capable of a twofold consideration; with respect to its incidents, and to their structure in composition. The incidents offer likewise a separate division to our notice; being distinguished into those which are natural and true, and those which are fictitious and marvellous. On these considerations, it seems expedient to ground the following distribution of these inquiries.

Sect. I. Of Incidents, real and probable.

Sect. II. Of Incidents, marvellous and fanciful.

Sect. III. Of Arrangement, or Oeconomy.

Sect. IV. Of Manners, and Sentiments.

Sect. V. Of Language, and Versification.

Besides this general distribution of the subject, it is susceptible of a still more minute consideration; as each of these general heads is referable to the separate divisions under which the higher productions of the art are arranged. According to the forementioned division of the incidents of poetry, as real or fictitious, the compositions of the Epopee and Drama are distinguished into the Historick Epopee, and Historick Drama, in the first place; and the Romantick Epos, and Romantick Drama, in the second: the "Pharsalia" of Lucan, and "Richard III." of Shakespeare, forming an example of the former; the "Orlando" of Ariosto, and "Tempest" of Shakespeare, an example of the latter. As occupying a middle rank between both, and partaking of their respective characteristicks, we may distinguish the poetical Epos, and the poetical Drama; including under the former, such works as the "Iliad" of Homer, and "Paradise Lost" of Milton; and under the latter, such works as the "Œdipus" of Sophocles, and "Othello" of Shakespeare.

Although poetry is susceptible of a still further division, besides that in which it is regarded as epick and dramatick, there seems

to be no necessity for giving it in any other form a distinct consideration in the subjoined essay. With regard to the Sentiments and Diction, as they form equally a part of poetry in every shape, compositions of whatever form, as amenable to the same rules, require no separate examination. The tendency of the subject of any work, or the greater part of its matter, as it happens to be marvellous or true, necessarily determines the character of the production as romantick, historical, or mixed. In this view, it may be considered as forming an episodical part of the higher compositions, and consequently, as being subject, with little exception, to the same rules with respect to its Manners, Incidents, and Arrangement. By this process, the necessity of considering Lyrical and Pastoral compositions, which occupy the next rank to those now specified, appears at once to be precluded. And with regard to the Didactick and Descriptive departments of poetry, there appears to be no reason for instituting a separate class for them, as they seem to admit but of few, if any, licences, independent of those of Sentiment and Language.

SECTION I.

OF

HISTORICAL INCIDENTS.



OF

HISTORICAL INCIDENTS.

THE first object of the poet, who has the general end of his art in view, is to select a subject capable of contributing to the pleasure of his readers, and which it is his design to prosecute through the varieties of plain or embellished narration. But he cannot conceive in idea, much less proceed so far as to be informed from experiment, that a subject deficient in that importance which is suited to the length and dignity of the species of composition in which he engages, will be calculated to excite interest, and uphold attention, from the commencement to the close of his production. Unimportant incidents, which are not otherwise recommended to particular notice by some engaging quality, may, in a production of ordinary length or merit, pass without remark; but when they

are treated with that labour and embellishment of style, which is generally essential to poetry, and particularly to epick composition, they must create so disproportionate a difference between the subject and its decorations, as will offer much to excite disgust, but little surely to promote our pleasure.

It is more than probable, that the poet, with a view to securing those qualities of interest and importance, which are essential to the higher compositions of his art, applies to history for a subject suited to the exercise of his powers: or that some train of historical occurrence, from possessing those qualities, recommends itself to him who feels the inspiration of the art, as being highly adapted to his purposes. But however great the events, and however exalted the characters which history exhibits, it rarely displays a continuity of action possessing that uniform elevation, and capable of upholding that uninterrupted interest, which the poet is called upon to maintain through the extent of his subject.

Where history is thus found to deny its support, invention offers its ready assistance; it opens a store of inexhaustible matter at

once within the poet's reach, and suited to his necessities. Even those persons who lay no claim to poetical inspiration, are observed, in relating any of the more trivial occurrences of life, to throw more interest into their account, by exaggerating what is unimportant, and supplying what is deficient in its matter. How much more then, must the artist be impelled to give a loose to his inventive powers, who may plead the immunities of poetical enthusiasm; who may receive a subject from history little calculated, from the blemishes that may deform, and the deficiencies that may mutilate it, to answer all that expectation may demand in his art? To the delicacy of his more refined sense, those flaws and imperfections, which escape the observation of grosser organs, must be particularly manifest: he must observe the necessity of polishing them down, or varnishing them over; and he must feel himself possessed of talents adequate to secure him success in such an undertaking. He must perceive himself endowed with the power of raising his conceptions beyond what he may observe in reality; of improving on what is beautiful, of elevating what is sublime, of

adding further ornament to what is embellished, and greater harmony to what is arranged.

We may hence look upon the poet as divided in his choice between opposing interests; as led, on the one hand, to maintain the importance of his subject by preserving its truth; and as induced, on the other, to heighten its beauty by increasing its embellishment. And whatever be the impulse to which he yields, his way lying through history, must either fall into the beaten track of reality, or deserting it, must pass into the confines of fiction. His course being thus prescribed, we may proceed to determine the nature and extent of those licences, in which he may be indulged in taking either direction.

Those places in which the poet does not conform to history, are evidently those alone in which his conduct in the present section demands any consideration. And here, since history is a science, there is a deviation from that standard, which, as has been observed, determines the nature of every licence, in as much as there is a deviation from history; for whatever fictitious matter is superadded

to an account generally true, must be a deviation from the authority professedly followed. Thus, in attributing irrascibility to Brutus, or valour to Domitius Anobarbus, in making Helen contemporary with Paris, or Dido with Æneas, the poet deviates from history, and is conceived to make use of a licence. So far the nature of this quality of poetical composition is, in the present instance, easily determined. But to ascertain the object of such deviations from science, seems attended with as little difficulty. In order that they should be allowable, without which they can be evidently no licences, they should at least conform more in their altered, than original state, to the end of poetry, by being more capable of giving pleasure, or awakening interest. And this end cannot be attained, without rendering the production *more striking:* for every improvement which is added to the original matter of the subject, as it increases its effect must strengthen its impressiveness.

So far the NATURE of those liberties taken with the science of history is explained, and shewn to possess every necessary conformity to the general definition formerly

given of Poetick Licence. But to what EXTENT these liberties may be carried, without transgressing the due bounds of licence, demands a more particular consideration.

CHAP. I.

OF THE HISTORICAL EPOS.

DIRECTING our attention to the historick epopee in the first place, every difficulty which requires a solution, in reference to its historical incidents, appears to be included in the following question.

What may be the liberties which a poet is permitted to take with the truth of the incidents, on which he founds an historick poem; or, to speak with a more immediate reference to the subject of the present investigation, how far in taking any such liberties will he be justified by Poetick Licence?

And this question may, I believe, receive a solution from unfolding and applying those principles, which direct the poet in the choice, and guide him in the management of his subject.

When we regard the more important incidents which form the action, or groundwork of the composition, they do not appear capable of deriving any advantage from the poet's pushing the bounds of truth into the

regions of fiction. In pursuing any track which occasionally falls into the direct course of history, a poet's way must be influenced by one of the before-mentioned principles of his art: it may be on the one side directed by an attachment to truth, or deflected on the other by the love of embellishment. But in his attempt to influence the reader's gratification, by means of the first of these qualities, his powers admit neither of increase or diminution. What is already truth, cannot be made more so; and of those persons, among whom he can expect to find readers, all must be supposed acquainted with the real statement of the more important facts in his subject. Nor does this happen to be the case with such readers only as live near the period when those occurrences took place, that are admitted into his descriptions; as his subject must, of necessity, be recommended by its dignity, it must rank among those great occurrences that exist longest, and most forcibly in the memory. The knowledge of the poet's subject being thus definite and general, the alteration of any historick incident, for the purpose of securing the second quality, and conferring some particular beauty of embellishment, must be productive of a

consequence, which, to a certain degree, will weaken the effect of the composition, by unfitting the mind for the perception of that pleasure, which it is intended to awaken. For it can scarcely admit of any doubt, that such a play of the imagination will arise from hence, as will rather distract our attention, than concentrate our interest, in the perusal; as the most striking circumstances in the authour's work will force themselves into a comparison, what he has altered contrasting itself with what we remember as true. Thus in the particular species of composition before us, where a number of recent events exist in our recollection, when the truth of any is sacrificed to embellishment, we must be either immediately shocked at the undertaking, or at least too far engrossed by a sense of its impropriety to remain in that state of freedom from prepossession, which will enable us to acknowledge any beauties that the poet may have acquired in his search after extraneous ornament.

This is, however, but a negative inconvenience, and consequently trivial, when compared with others which may be apprehended to arise, when the poet ventures upon the project of blending fiction with truth in a

composition professedly historical. On carrying such a scheme into execution, circumstances will occur which will not merely weaken but counteract the effect of his composition. For, on account of the extended knowledge of his subject, every alteration of its important incidents must be a violation of received truths; and hence it will unavoidably happen, that the expedient by which this alteration is effected will operate in a contrary direction, as well to the general end of the art, as to the particular means by which this species of composition aims at securing this general end. It deprives us of that portion of pleasure which arises from the consideration of truth; a quality that in no slight degree contributes to advance the end of such a work as an historical poem, the subject of which is chiefly recommended by its dignity and importance. We must consider moreover every alteration of an historick incident as being made suitably to the character of the production in which it is attempted: when this is not the case, whatever be the change effected, it must fail in its end, from the sense we retain of its want, not only of truth, but of propriety. Such however is the serious character of all historical com-

position, that it will not admit of those means of exciting pleasure which are appropriate to works of a different description. It will not, in fact, permit that continued address to the more powerful emotions, which constitute our delight in the perusal of such productions as the drama or marvellous epos; and which, by engrossing the mind, leave it insensible to the violence which is offered to its received notions, when striking facts are misrepresented or altered.

These considerations on the serious character of the historick poem, may be prosecuted even further in confirmation of the same position. From the necessity incumbent on the poet of preserving such a character, we may fairly deduce, that he is confined to the observation, if not of truth, at least of verisimilitude; a quality which criticism[d] has in all ages, pronounced requisite to the poet in detailing, as well the matter which he finds,*

[d] Φανερον δε εκ των ειρημενων, και οτι ε το τα γενομενα λεγειν, τουτο ποιητου εργον εστιν, αλλ' οια αν γενοιτο, και τα δυνατα κατα το εικος, η το αναγκαιον. Arist. De Poet. § 18.

* For historical or true events may sometimes be improbable. Thus M. Boileau, after Aristotle, observes,

Jamais au spectateur n'offrez rien d'incroyable;
Le vrai peut quelquefois n'etre pas vraisemblable.
L'Art. Poet. III. v. 47.

as that which he supplies in his subject. Now among those subjects which are purely fictitious, or are so remote in point of time as to be known with little certainty, the mind, from having no standard to decide how far they may be false or real, may be led to admit every thing in them as far as it is probable. But this is not the case with our thoughts on subjects that have not only a positive, but a recent existence. In them the standard of truth is fixed and determinable. And so far so, that if we depart from their reality we annul their verisimilitude: for in altering any incident of which we have an accurate knowledge, it is evident we take from it the appearance of truth. If, therefore, verisimilitude is necessary to poetry, it is a fair inference to assert, that in order to preserve it in the historick epos, no alteration or embellishment can take place which affects the reality of its incidents, as far as they are known and important.

From this view of the subject the authours of the "Pharsalia," and the "Campaign," who have been so often censured for a rigid adherence to reality, appear rather to merit applause than to need justification. Nor am I of opinion, that their practice in construct-

ing their works with that historick fidelity which we discover in them, is to be attributed more to choice than to necessity. As living near the period which produced those illustrious actions which their respective poems were intended to celebrate, they saw them in that strong point of view, in which great and recent events take hold of the recollection. The splendid objects to which their admiration had been turned had indeed gone down, but their departed glories still continued to illuminate the horizon. The poet and his readers must thus have stood in the same view with respect to the circumstances of his poem: both must equally have seen the impropriety of confounding in detail, the boundaries of truth and falsehood; and writing under this impression, the artist naturally drew from his own feelings, a production suited to the feelings of his readers.

Nor can the imperfections of a less important rank, which criticks discover in the historick productions just mentioned, be insisted on as recommending a contrary practice to the poet, or be urged as abridging the exemplification of the doctrine which has been laid down on the present subject. Under cover of the same principles, the minuter

charges urged against the poetical merits of Lucan find an easy answer. Voltaire objects to certain dryness in his style, arising from a close adherence to history; and observes, that his title to being a poet, is secured only by the uniform elevation discoverable in his work.[f] Tasso, going still farther, declares that he is no poet, because he adheres so closely to particular truths, that he pays no attention to universality; and because he relates things as they happened, not as they ought to have happened.[g] But these censures seem to affect the poet only when the particular character of his composition is not taken into consideration; and amount to no more, than his not having embellished his subject with ornaments incompatible with its nature.

[f] Lucain n'osé s'ecarter de l'histoire; par là il a rendu son poëme sec, et aride.—en un mot, il est grand partout, où il ne veut point être poëte. Sur la Poes. Epiq. chap. III.

[g] E s'io credo Lucano non esser poeta, non mi muove a ciò credere quella ragione che induce alcuni altri in si fatta credenza, cioè che egli non sia poeta perchè narra veri avvenimenti. Questo solo non basta, ma poeta non è egli, perchè talmente *s'obliga alla verità de' particolari, che non ha rispetto al verisimile in universale,* e pur che *narra le cose come sono state fatte, non si cura d'imitarle, come dovriano essere state fatte.* Dell' Art. Poet. Discors. 2.

If we inquire into the grounds on which these censures on the barrenness of invention in historick poetry have been rested, the search will furnish us with additional reasons for considering them invalid. They will, I think, be found to be grounded on a maxim, which has imposed on us too much, from coming recommended by the authority of Aristotle, and justified by the practice of Homer. The passage to which I allude, draws a line of distinction between the separate provinces of the poet and the historian.[h] And of its influence in producing these censures upon Lucan, the last mentioned authours give a decisive evidence in adopting its matter and language; and this censure appears to be retailed at second hand, by those writers of an inferiour class, in whom also it is found.

But in carrying up our doubt of the authority of this maxim to its source, however imposing the names of Homer and Aristotle must ever be, their voices can convey no testimony to determine the present question.

[h] Ο γαρ ιστορικος και ο ποιητης, ϑ τῳ η εμμετρα λεγειν η αμεῖρα διαφερϑειν· ειη γαρ αν τα Ηροδοτϑ εις μετρα τιϑεναι, και ϑδεν ηττον αν ειη ιστορια τις μετα μετρϑ, η ανευ μετρων· αλλα τϑτῳ διαφερει, τῳ τον μεν τα γενομενα λεγειν, τον δε οῖα αν γενοιτο. De Poet. § 18.

as one proof of which, let it be remembered, they both preceded, by a considerable time, the existence of such a production as an historick poem. Aristotle drew his rules, at least of epick poetry, from Homer; and Homer wrote at a period when all important occurrences were committed to the almost certain misrepresentation of tradition; but Lucan, when they were fixed by the definite language of history. Of course, Homer and Lucan wrote under circumstances the most opposite; and to try the one by the practice of the other, or by any rule deducible from it, is to measure him, not so much by an authority which he has no right to acknowledge, as by a standard which possesses no scale to appreciate his merits or defects. Far am I from maintaining, that this maxim of Aristotle does not contain much general truth: this is so much the case, that we may draw from it the justification of many particulars in the conduct even of Lucan. To omit mentioning the circumstance of figurative and metrical language, in which he introduces his heroes speaking; much of the dignity with which he has elevated his subject, much of the decoration with which he has adorned it, may be justified on the licence permitted in

this maxim to a poet, as opposed to the fidelity exacted from the historian.

On the whole, I am inclined to imagine, that in judging of the poetical description of the "Pharsalia," and of other historick epopees, the charges urged against their authours have partly proceeded from our considering the facts which enter the details of such poems, not as they are placed with respect to the poet, but as they are situated with regard to ourselves. From the comparative remoteness of the period in which we exist, many circumstances of inconsiderable note must have disappeared from our observation, which were regarded as important by the poet. This consideration will at least serve to account for that attachment of Lucan to particular truths which gave offence to Tasso, and for that attention to minuter occurrences, which drew down the censure of Voltaire.

The cause of historick poets which I now espouse, is not destitute of support, and of support drawn from high authority, and founded upon just and pertinent observation. The conduct of Addison, in rejecting fiction in his "Campaign," has been pronounced

by a celebrated writer, rational and manly.[j] And it has been well observed by Voltaire, though, it must be confessed, his practice possessed little consistency with his principles: " Il [Lucain] ne fut pas le premier qui choisit une histoire récente pour le sujet d'un poeme épique. Varius, cotemporain de Virgile, mais dont les ouvrages ont eté perdus, avait executé avec succès cette dangereuse enterprise. La proximité des tems, la notorieté publique de la guerre civile, le siecle eclairé, politique, et peu superstitieux ou vivaient César et Lucain, la solidité de son sujet, ôtoient a son genie tout liberté d'invention fabuleuse."[k] This must be the character of every recent subject which is chosen for an historical epos; and this observation, if admitted to be just, must as well determine the practice of the modern poet, as justify the conduct of the ancient.

Thus it is, that in the manner of narrating those principal incidents which form the action or groundwork of his subject, the poet is limited to historick truth. Let me

[j] Johnson's Life of Addison. Works, Vol. X. p. 115. Ed. 1806.

[k] Sur la Pocs. Epique, ub. supr.

not be conceived, however, to maintain, that he should sink his importance in that of the mere historian. We come to the perusal of the different compositions of poetry and history, with very different expectations to be gratified. We require in the former, as it is written principally to inform, and not so much to interest us, that it should speak the truth, and speak it without addition or concealment. From the rigour of such a law, the compositions of the latter kind must be fully exempted, as the productions of an artist who labours with the opposite end, rather to delight than to instruct his readers. The poet, in encroaching on the province of the historian, condescending as he does, to be indebted to him for his subject, must repay the debt, at least by an acknowledgment. Hence we require truth also from him suitably to his engagements; but we expect to contemplate it as through a mist, in partial amplification and concealment.

And hence from the reasoning which has been employed to establish these assumptions, and the general confirmation which they receive from the practice of those writers who have carried this species of composition to perfection, we may proceed to lay down the

following rules, as marking out the extent of those licences, which may be taken by the historical poet in receding from the science of history.

With respect to incidents which are striking and well authenticated, if they happen not to be suited to the end of his composition, the poet may claim every indulgence in *omitting* them at pleasure. This is a licence which, with due limitations, is permitted to the historian; for he may select in his details, from the mass of occurrences incident to any people, the particular project or expedition happening at some particular time; and he is never called upon to deliver more upon a subject thus chosen, than is necessary to its individual comprehension. But more particularly with respect to those facts which retain any marks of being little or doubtful, both the poet and historian must find it their interest to suppress them altogether, as they will equally find it their advantage to retain those which bear the stamp of being grand and probable.

But this immunity cannot be claimed with respect to *introducing* incidents which are important, either on account of their greatness, their duration, or their notoriety;

though in admitting such materials in his composition, there may seem to be no contradiction given to any thing which history asserts as truth, as they must be evidently the product of invention. Any distinction which would be made in favour of these incidents is not real, but imaginary; for the introduction of all such facts, must be virtually an alteration, if not of the particular truth of any incident in the work, most certainly of that collective truth which makes up the body of its subject, and which by its general effect affords the most striking interest to engage the imagination.

On the whole, with the important incidents, no liberty should be taken in altering their verity, where they happen to be authentick. And here we may appeal to Lucan, as fully confirming and exemplifying the above doctrine; and the more so as his character for historick fidelity is so generally admitted, that it may be collectively cited without descending to a specifick induction of particular passages. Thus far at least his testimony receives the sanction of the criticks as unexceptionable, and definitive; but as a suffrage singularly appropriate in favour of his fidelity, we may adduce, in Florus, the

testimony of an historian, who has adopted his narrative as affording sufficient grounds for his details, and has followed and enlarged upon his authority.[1]

These incidents of greater note and importance, however, may be reducible to the rank of unimportant, from being questionable as to their truth, or doubtful as to their authority. In the former case, it is needless to remark, that they are only subject to the restrictions under which all unimportant incidents are placed. In the latter case, where there is a choice in facts, recommended by different authorities, the poet is at liberty to adopt even those which are of inferiour certainty, provided they have some credit, and afford any thing to heighten the beauty, or improve the interest of his subject. For the importance of such incidents being sunk in the circumstance of their truth being questionable, and as they possess little to recommend them in point of verisimilitude, in having but doubtful credit, it is by their beauty principally that they can impart that pleasure, which is the end of his compo-

[1] The commentators on Lucan have occasionally pointed out the imitations of this historian from the poet; as an instance in point, see their illustrations of lib. iv. v. 402.

sitions, and which saves their littleness and their doubtfulness from observation.

There are facts besides those which we term important, such as are virtually inconsiderable in themselves, and hang upon the subject by a slight dependance, without contributing essentially to forward its action. It is over such *subordinate incidents*, that the Poetick Licence of the historick epopee extends with the greatest latitude; and under the cover of it the poet may claim the liberty of altering, omitting, or introducing them, as may be most conducive to the consummation of that interest which it is the end of his art to awaken. The power he may use over incidents of this description, is subject to no restriction but that of preserving them in their subordinate character: for, as it is almost needless to observe, this character being once exceeded, those facts change their nature, and became subject to every restriction in having become important.

The confirmation and exemplification of these conclusions, may be likewise referred to the decision of Lucan; to his work we may confidently appeal, as affording some justification of the rectitude, and every illustration of the feasibility of this doctrine.

The poet, however rigidly attached he may appear to historick truth, has yet occasionally availed himself of those licences in altering subordinate incidents, which were calculated to heighten the effect of his poem, by rendering it more striking. Thus we may observe, that in order to increase the interest of his work by exalting the popular cause, it is his general practice to extol the actions of those persons who devoted themselves to the side of liberty, and to depress the characters of those who attached themselves to the politicks of Cæsar. With this view, he has used a considerable licence in magnifying beyond the truth of history, the characters of some of Pompey's adherents. Thus Domitius Ænobarbus is uniformly represented as courageous and warlike, though certainly not well entitled to such commendation.

[m] At te Corfini validis circumdata muris
Tecta tenent *pugnax* Domiti.
PHARS. lib. ii. v. 478.

[m] But in Corfinium *bold* Domitius lies,
And from its walls the advancing power defies.
ROWE'S PHARS. ii. v. 722.

[n] tibi numine *pugnax*
Adverso, Domiti, dextri frons tradita Martis.
Ib. lib. vii. v. 219.

His conduct when pardoned by Cæsar at Corfinium, is made to appear noble and exalted.

[o] premit ille graves interritus iras
Et secum: 'Romamne petes, pacisque recessus
'Degener? Tu medios belli non ire furores
'Jamdudum moriture paras? Rue dertus, et omnes
'Lucis sumpe moras, et Cæsaris effuge munus.'
Ib. lib. ii. v. 521.

And his death at the battle of Pharsalia, is distinguished with every mark of honour.

[p] Mors tamen *eminuit clarorum in strage virorum*
Pugnacis Domiti, quem clades fata per omnes

[n] Luckless Domitius, vainly *brave in war*,
Drew forth the right with unauspicious care.
Ib. vii. v. 325.

[o] Struggling with rage, undaunted he repress
The swelling passions in his lab'ring breast;
Thus murm'ring to himself: 'wo't thou to Rome
Base as thou art, and seek thy lazy home?
To war, to battle, to destruction fly,
And haste, as it becomes thee well, to die;
Provoke the worst effects of deadly strife,
And rid thee of this Cæsar's gift, this life.'
Ib. ii. v. 786.

[p] Among huge heaps of the Patrician slain,
And Latian chiefs, who strew'd that purple plain,

Ducebant. Nusquam Magni fortuna sine illo
Succubuit: victus toties a Cæsare, salvâ
Libertate perit: tunc mille in vulnera lætus
Labitur, ac veniâ gaudet caruisse secundâ.
Ib. lib. vii. v. 599.

But this art is more fully displayed by the poet, in the portraiture which he gives of the character and conduct of Cæsar; which he represents in a far different light from that attested by the general voice of history. In an early part of his work he thus speaks of him:

[q] Cæsar in arma furens, nullas nisi sanguine fuso
Gaudet habere vias, quod non terat hoste vacantes

Recording story has distinguish'd well,
How brave, unfortunate Domitius fell.
In ev'ry loss of Pompey still he shar'd
And dy'd in liberty, the best reward;
Though vanquished oft by Cæsar, ne'er enslav'd,
Ev'n to the last, the tyrant's pow'r he brav'd:
Mark'd o'er with many a glorious streaming wound,
In pleasure sunk the warrior to the ground;
No longer forc'd on vilest terms to live,
For chance to doom, and Cæsar to forgive.
Ib. vii. v 862.

[q] But Cæsar for destruction eager burns,
Free passages and bloodless ways he scorns;
In fierce conflicting fields his arms delight,
He joys to be oppos'd, to prove his might,
Resistless through the wid'ning breach to go,
To burst the gates, and lay the bulwark low;

Hesperiæ fines, vacuosque irrumpat in agros
Atque ipsum non perdat iter, confertaque bellis
Bella gerat, non tam portas intrare patentes
Quam fregisse juvat: nec tam patiente colono
Arva premi, quam si ferro populetur, et igni.
Concessâ pudet ire viâ, civemque videri.

Ib. lib. ii. v. 439.

Before the battle of Pharsalia he describes him as invoking the furies, and the gods that presided over crimes, to afford him their assistance.

[p] At tu quos scelerum superos? Quas rite vocasti
Eumenidas Cæsar? Stygii quæ numina regni?
Infernumque nefas? Et mersas nocte furores?
Impia tam sævæ gesturus bella litasti?

Ib. lib. vii. v. 168.

To burn the villages, to waste the plains,
And massacre the poor laborious swains.
Abhorring law, he chooses to offend,
And blushes to be thought his country's friend.

Ib. ii. v. 669.

[r] But who, O Cæsar! who were then thy Gods?
Whom didst thou summon from their dark abodes?
The furies listen'd to thy grateful vows,
And dreadful to the day the pow'rs of hell arose.

Ib. viii. v. 257.

This licence is peculiarly striking, as historians have particularized the sacrifices Cæsar offered to Mars and his tutelary goddess, Venus, the night before the battle, and have mentioned his vows to raise a temple to the goddess Victory if she favoured him in the contest.

But the most striking example of this licence may be drawn from the representation of his conduct after the fatal battle. He is first described as exciting his victorious army to plunder and rapine:

' ' Victoria nobis
' Plena, viri,' dixit, ' superest pro sanguine merces
' Quam monstrare meum est: nec enim donare vocabo
' Quod sibi quisque dabit.——
' Tot regum fortuna simul, Magnique coacta
' Expectat dominos: propera præcedere miles
' Quos sequeris: quascunque tuas Pharsalia fecit,
' A victis rapiantur opes.' Ib. lib. vii. v. 737.

As rejoicing in the slaughter, and satiating his rage in viewing the destruction of his countrymen.

' Behold, he cries, our victory complete,
The glorious recompence attends ye yet:
Much have you done to day, for Cæsar's sake;
'Tis mine to shew the prey, 'tis yours to take.
'Tis yours whate'er the vanquish'd foe has left;
'Tis what your valour gain'd, and not my gift.
For you the once great Pompey's store attends,
With regal spoils of his barbarian friends;
Haste then, prevent the foe, and seize that good
For which you paid so well with Roman blood.
Ib. vii. v. 1052.

[t] Postquam clara dies Pharsalica damna retexit,
Nulla loci facies revocat feralibus arvis
Hærentes oculos. Cernit propulsa cruore
Flumina, et excelsos cumulis æquantia colles
Corpora, sidentes in tabem spectat acervos,
Et Magni numerat populos: epulisque paratur
Ille locus, vultus ex quo, faciesque jacentum
Agnoscat. Juvat Emathiam non cernere terram
Et lustrare oculis campos sub clade latentes.
Ib. lib. vii. v. 787.

And even denying the last offices of sepulture to their remains.

[u] Ac ne læta furens scelerum spectacula perdat,
Invidet igne rogi miseris, cœloque nocenti

[t] But soon the visionary horrors pass,
And his first rage with day resumes its place:
Again his eyes rejoice to view the slain,
And run unweary'd o'er the dreadful plain.
He bids his train prepare his impious board,
And feasts amidst the heaps of death abhorr'd.
There each pale face at leisure he may know,
And still behold the purple current flow.
He views the woful wide horizon round,
And joys that earth is no where to be found,
And owns, those Gods he serves, his utmost wish have crown'd.
Ib. vii. v. 1110.

[u] Still greedy to possess the curs'd delight,
To glut his soul, and gratify his sight,
The last funereal honours he denies,
And poisons with the stench Emathia's skies.
Not thus the sworn invet'rate foe of Rome
Refus'd the vanquish'd consul's bones a tomb:

Ingerit Emathiam. Non illum Pænus humator
Consulis, et Libycâ succensæ lampade Cannæ
Conpellunt, hominum ritus ut servet in hostes:
Sed meminit nondum satiatâ cœdibus irâ,
Cives esse suos. Ib. lib. vii. v. 797.

How such liberties may be allowed, and yet be reconcileable with verisimilitude, a principle which was laid down as essential to compositions of the historical kind, and which was taken as affording one of the strongest arguments in favour of adhering to historical truth, may be thus briefly established.

With respect to those incidents which are drawn from history, as they are not considerable, the historian's authority becomes no ultimate test of their truth. Events of lesser importance admit of a different statement according to the different opinions by which they are imbibed or transmitted: and under the supposition of the historian's being mistaken, which daily experience informs not to be improbable, the poet is at liberty to adopt

His piety the country round beheld,
And bright with fires shone Cannæ's fatal field.
But Cæsar's rage from fiercer motives rose;
These were his countrymen, his worst of foes.
Ib. vii. v. 1121.

a different mode of detailing them in description, particularly if, when thus altered, they will be more suited to the purposes of his composition.

With respect to matters of lesser importance, which are left undecided by history, the poet's practice, as it cannot be determined by reality, is to be estimated by probability. But many circumstances of inconsiderable note, which give poetry its most engaging touches, if recorded in history, would be inconsistent with that utility which is the end of historick narration: others there are, which being indispensable to the closeness and fidelity of historick detail, would offend against that general delight which is the end of poetical composition. Many of the incidents consequently, which find a place in poetry, may be considered true, although destitute of historical authority: nor can the evidence of the historian be adduced as negativing their reality, although he does not afford them his support or countenance. Being devoid of this testimony, their truth seems capable of being determined only by their probability, which it is always in the poet's power to create, according as the cir-

cumstances of his composition render it expedient.

But in this estimate historick fidelity is conceived to be invariable, whereas the conduct even of historians, more particularly in detailing the characters of their work, admits of considerable latitude. It is sufficient to observe that it is the general practice among the most celebrated proficients in this science, to add more interest to their favourite characters, by heightening and embellishing their actions. This must be evident to any person who examines the different representations given by different historians of the same eminent characters: and not merely of those personages who lived before or near their own times, but of their very cotemporaries. When we see those biassed representations among the most accurate detailers of facts, the foundation of whose works is exactness and fidelity, how much more should we admit them into the composition of a poet, the very essence of whose art is interest and pleasure?

But we may extend this principle further, so as to embrace another circumstance, in which the conduct of Lucan may be men-

tioned with almost exclusive approbation: namely the additional embellishment which he has given his poem in the several speeches ascribed by him to his different characters: a portion of his work which may be distinguished among the adscititious parts which the poet is licenced to incorporate on his subject. It must be here also observed that historians, however bound to follow the plain track of reality, are yet accustomed to heighten the dramatick parts of their works: and this licence is most justly extended to them. For, words are of so fleeting a nature, that unless they are marked by some peculiarity in the thought, or turn in the expression, they can seldom be relied on as accurately reported, or well authenticated. Of course the poet who undertakes to narrate them possesses a privilege of deviating again from the historian: when the authority from whence he derives his materials is doubtful, he has every liberty of turning its uncertainty to his advantage.

In this respect Lucan is particularly happy: the merit of his several orations is so conspicuous, and they have conferred so much additional splendour on his poem, that even those criticks, who carry the severity of

their strictures so far as to deny him a place among poets, allow him to rank high among orators. These ornaments are in fact most admirably suited to the serious and dignified nature of the historick poem; and as such he has devoted to them his most particular attention. So far so indeed, that, (if we except Achilles' answer to Ulysses in the "Iliad") his orations must be confessed to have excelled those of all other epick poets, whether ancient or modern, in the copiousness and energy of their style, and in the vividness and animation of their diction.

CHAP. II.

OF THE ROMANTICK EPOS.

At the very opposite extreme of the historick epopee, is placed, as I have already observed, the epick romance; and this is so far the case, that the former appears the converse of the latter; what is incompatible in the one, is indispensable in the other. The historick epos, as its title imports, requires a foundation in historick facts; but the epick romance finds a sufficient support in legendary story.

The mode of inquiry with respect to the licences allowable in the incidents of this division of poetry, becomes of course the converse of that employed with respect to the historick poem; as in the latter case, it was our object to discover how far fiction is compatible with what is true, in the present instance we have to inquire how far history is consistent with what is fictitious in composition. And of the same nature is the conclusion which these inquiries will be found to establish: as fiction was shewn to be generally excluded from the composition of the

former, history will be found to be equally inadmissible in the constitution of the latter.

The assertion now hazarded, on the incompatibility of a purely historical subject with a poetical romance, will not require to be discussed with much intricacy of argument before it is established. And though the assertion may appear at first rather paradoxical, it is, however, a fact, that to embody productions of this kind with history, and thus to give them an absolute foundation in reality, would tend only to diminish those qualities of truth, probability, individuality, and embellishment, which make up the notion of that ideal beauty, by which the poet may be supposed bound to regulate his fictions.

The essence of the poetical romance consists in a wildness of fiction, which derives its appearance of truth, not from our knowledge, but credulity: the fictitious parts of such compositions can of course derive little improvement from a forced alliance with that science which possessing no varieties of change, is confined to the straight line of real occurrence. Over facts which have once occurred we have no power of alteration; we may

misrepresent, but we cannot virtually change them: it must of course pervert and destroy the nature of such materials, in any production whatever, to blend them with fictitious circumstances. When we join those discordant ingredients, not by incorporation, but in succession, such an union must be equally unpromising of a successful issue; as it must tend rather to bring discredit on that part of the composition which we must believe as being true, than give probability to that part which we must doubt as being preternatural. In this mixture, we can be as little said to improve the general effect which arises from the verisimilitude of the entire subject, as the verisimilitude produced in any of its parts; for what is partially fictitious, cannot be collectively true.

This reasoning is equally conclusive when, in point of extent and magnitude, the historick part of the subject bears no proportion to the fictitious. Of a very different nature is the power which the mind possesses over real and over imaginary occurrences: those, we have observed, it cannot alter; over these it exercises a power of varying them even to an unlimited degree. By whatever modes of combination these heterogeneous materials may

be connected, it must be therefore pretty evident, that the part which is fictitious must bend and accommodate itself, as being more ductile, to that which is real and unalterable; and that this circumstance will give the work that marked turn of feature, which is to determine its character as historick or marvellous. Fiction is, under its most fascinating appearance, of a rare and subtle nature; it may be rendered at once beautiful and considerable, from the extent to which it may be drawn out, and the exility with which it may be superinduced on the exteriour of any subject; but reality takes a more forcible hold of the observation, from the prominence and solidity with which it stands above the level of the surface. A romance, therefore, constructed on a historick subject, becomes a regular claimant, from its nature, to the title of a production founded on fact; and regarded in this light, what is historical in its composition must at least fix the æra, and determine the bounds of its subject. The case of the poetical romance becomes, in this view, analogous to that of the historick poem; both must be considered the expansion, in poetical language, of a certain number of facts, and of facts whereof the reader is supposed to possess a steady

view, and a perfect knowledge. If, therefore, the mind rejects, as an imperfection, the licence of alteration in the one species of production, how much more will it revolt against that unbounded fiction, which the other does not take as an appendage, but claims as a principal component in its productions?

It is almost superfluous to remark, that from the present consideration of the poetical romance, that case is excluded where the real occurrences, on which the work is founded, have undergone such alterations as prevents them from being known: for such a plan, though said, and with much propriety, to be founded on fact, must be considered purely fictitious, as facts appear no longer in its composition.

But in assuming the case of a romance being founded on history, if the subject of the poem appears to receive no improvement in its truth or probability, it is impossible it can be benefited by the alliance in any other particular. To give it a dash of individual nature,[w] which gives a strength of colouring

w See Sir J. Reynolds' Notes on Du Fresnoy's Art of Painting as quoted by Mr. Twining, in his Notes to Aristotle's Poeticks, p. 509.

to all the compositions of art, may be conceived within the power of history, which is occasionally dedicated to the particular occurrences incident to extraordinary persons. But any accessions which it could derive in this respect, it may acquire from other sources, or may appropriate from the science in consideration, without being bound to adopt such attendant circumstances, as will make facts the basis of its subject, or give the production the title of being historical. Nor can the romantick poem derive any improvement from history in point of embellishment. For a liberty of giving such a direction to the facts and circumstances of the work as may suit the poet's caprice, being implied in the very nature of this species of composition as being fictitious, it follows, from the power which the mind possesses of improving in conception on almost every object submitted to the imagination, that the romantick poet inherits a greater power of contributing to our delight by realizing an imaginary creation, than he could possibly attain by following the direct track of real events, however splendid and dignified.

But though the poet is thus debarred from giving his composition a general alliance with

history, he is not excluded from affording it some bearing upon truth. In fact, the magnitude of his compositions, and the commanding authority of those great persons who have preceded him in such an undertaking, seem to exact that his subject should be founded on facts: while the nature of his poem, equally strengthened by the same precedents,[x] imposes a law no less binding, that these facts should never have been committed to authentick record. From the first of these prin-

[x] Such fabulous histories as those of Turpin and Geoffrey of Monmouth, are the authorities on which those compositions are principally founded. The former is frequently referred to by Ariosto.

E *Turpin* scrive a punto, che fur, &c.
Cant. xiii. Ott. 40.

Non si legge in *Turpin*, che n'avvenisse;
Ma vidi già un Autor, che più ne scrisse.
Scrive l'autore, il cui nome mi taccio:
Che non fuor, &c. Cant. xxiv. Ott. 44.

Mettendolo *Turpino*, anch'io l'ho messo, &c.
Cant. xxviii. Ott. 2.

Scrive *Turpin*, verace in questo loco,
Che due, o tre giù, &c. Cant. xxx. Ott. 49.

Non ho veduto mai, nè letto altrove
Fuor ch' in *Turpin*, d'un sì fatto animale.
Cant. xxxiii. Ott. 85.

Many of the chief incidents in the "Fairy Queen," have been traced by Mr. Warton to still less authentick sources. See his Observations on Spenser. Vol. I. sect. ii.

ciples he transfers to his work the name of its hero, and some of the leading circumstances of his achievements; from the latter, he derives the power of forming his plot, of interweaving with it such wild incidents as contribute to its advancement, and of adapting to it such grotesque particulars as this extravagant species of composition delights in.

And this reasoning is as generally exemplified, as that on the historick epopee, in the productions of every writer who has excelled in the romantick department of poetry. We find no instance of a poet applying for the subject of such a work to any source, but that in which even apparent truth became suspicious from being forced into an alliance with some contiguous improbability. Thus the period of the European annals, from which Pulci, Boyardo, and Ariosto, took the subject of their romances, was one which received no steady illumination from the clear lights of history; and Spenser, writing with similar views, was led in search of his subject into an æra which was involved in all the remoteness and obscurity of the darker ages.

The poetical romance, being thus excluded from authentick history, must rely on

fiction to supply those principal incidents which constitute the groundwork of its fable. And this being the case, it regularly arranges itself under that part of my inquiry which is professedly devoted to what is marvellous in the composition of poetry. I shall therefore dismiss it for the present with a single remark. The more important incidents being thus derived from fiction, they afford the poet an opportunity of varying them by every species of licence; by which means the striking contrast that exists between romantick and historick productions, is preserved to a remarkable degree. For this liberty is permitted to the historick poet over those incidents only, which are the reverse of important; while it extends to the romantick poet over its principal events, and over the body of those descriptions which hold the most considerable share in the constitution of its subject.

CHAP. III.

OF THE POETICAL EPOS.

We have already seen that the historick poem nearly excludes the intermixture of fiction with its realities, and that the poetical romance is equally averse from constructing its details upon history. One of the chief circumstances which mark the superiority of the poetical epos over both these kinds of composition, is that of giving to its subject an equal alliance with facts and fiction, and securing to it the contrary qualities of being marvellous and true.

From this consideration on the nature of the poetical epopee, our mode of inquiry into the licences admissible in the art again shifts its position. For on balancing between what is fictitious, and what is historical in this department of the art, and inclining successively to either extreme, the object of research appears to branch out into the following diversities.

I. May the poet take his subject wholly from invention?

II. Or, may he be indulged in deriving it wholly from history?

III. On taking a middle course between truth and fiction, what proportion of each will he be constrained to preserve: what licences in fact may he take in what is historical, and what is fictitious in his subject?

I. The project of founding an epick poem upon a fictitious subject has been opposed by Tasso. He combats such an undertaking on the principle of its weakening the interest by destroying the verisimilitude of the composition. " Molto meglio è a mio giudicio, che d'all'istoria si prenda; perchè dovendo l'Epico circare in ogni parte il verisimile, (presuppongo questo come principio notissimo,) non e verisimile che una azione illustre, quale sono quelle del poema Eroico, non sia stata scritta, e passata alla memoria de' posteri coll' ajuto d'alcuna istoria. I successi grandi non possono essere incogniti, e ove non siano ricevuti in iscrittura, da questo solo argomentano gli uomini la loro falsità, e falsi stimandogli, non consentono cosi facilmente d'essere or mossi ad ira, or a terrore, or a pietà: d'essere or allegrati, or contristati, or sospesi, or rapiti, ed insomma non attendono con quella aspettazione, e con

quel diletto i successi delle cose, come farebbono, si que' medessimi successi, o in tutto, o in parte veri stimassero."[y]

The conclusion contained in these observations is incontestibly just: but as the reasons on which it is founded very materially affect the force of those arguments employed in illustrating the principles of fictitious poetry, they require some consideration before they are unconditionally admitted. That we are not so easily moved by what is fictitious as by what is true, if assumed by the authour, or supposed to follow from his reasoning, is an assumption which does not appear to be borne out by general experience. The interest we take in the perusal of our popular novels, whose subjects are in general fictitious, will at once prove it unfounded. But even if the appeal to this species of composition were not found to leave this assertion at least problematical, the argument might be shewn to establish a conclusion very irrelative to the present occasion. For admitting that a fictitious tale has not the same sway over the passions as one

y Tasso "Dell' Art. Poet." Dis. I.

that is true, it may surely possess all the influence which is requisite in the species of composition which confines our present consideration. And that it does possess such requisite influence is the more admissible, as the tales of fictitious history move us to a most powerful degree; and as the productions of epick poetry can never appropriate such a share of emotion, as is attainable in fiction, nor lay claim to such a portion of truth as will make much difference in the concern we feel for the interests and distresses of the characters in its subject.

But another circumstance seems adequate to justify a little caution on our part in declining to assent to the authour's arguments, while we subscribe to his conclusion: as he appears to fix upon qualities in the composition of epick poetry very different from those which impart to it its real character. To this observation I am led only from a conviction that such a mistaken idea of the character of the epick muse, if supposed to proceed from such an authority, may be urged against the line of proof which I am necessitated to take in strengthening the same conclusion, although reasoning on different principles. Had not the inimitable

authour stooped too low in considering so narrow an object as that before us, and thus turned from the general view of that art which he could not have misconceived, or would not have misrepresented, it is evident he would not have overlooked the objections to his reasonings which suggest themselves to a more confined, but a more cautious observation. For the circumstance of his having reasoned from principles so exceptionable we may assign the true cause; it afforded the most ready solution of the difficulty that absorbed his attention. But that such is not the real character of the art; that it does not principally address itself to the more perturbed emotions of the breast, nay that such a project, if realized by any poet, would be unsuitable to that calm and subdued dignity which is indispensable in the pure epical character, is an assumption which might be confirmed, and exemplified, by an appeal to that exquisite specimen, which the authour in question has given of his powers in genuine epical poetry.

On reducing the question to its proper level, and taking a true notion of the epical character, the same conclusion will be placed above being affected by any of those excep-

tions drawn from fictitious history, to which it is seemingly exposed under the present misrepresented appearance. To set the point in question in a more clear and apposite light, it will be necessary to open our view a little more into the nature of both these species of composition, and to regard them with a particular reference to each other. And here let the reader whose fastidiousness may turn from the degrading comparison into which the works of the epick poet are made to descend, in being brought into a competition with those of the novelist, remember the object with which our undertaking is bounded. Let him remember likewise that, by however great a distance these different kinds of composition are kept apart, they agree in one capital circumstance; the works of the novelist not being inferiour even to those of the epick poet in respect of uniting those qualities of pleasure and instruction which constitute the principal and indeed only end of poetical composition.

That scope and object, which he who undertakes to write a novel prescribes to himself, admits of little variety. The interest of his subject turns on the fate of two persons

of a rank not superiour to that of most of his readers. These he first involves in a hopeless attachment; he afterwards embarrasses them in difficulties, and perplexes them in dangers, and finally conducts them to that union in which their wishes end, together with the expectation of the reader. Of a suitable elevation to the characters thus chosen, are the incidents and the end purposed in the composition. The occurrences are made to surprise merely by being unexpected; and the end is never of greater importance than the celebration of a marriage, or the acquirement of a fortune. It is only by heightening the interests of a subject thus entered on and conducted, that the authour can supply its want of importance. This he effects by moving the heart and stimulating the affections to a powerful degree; by hurrying the mind in a tide of tumultuous delight which leaves it little consideration to look for, or to admit other gratification. It is with this view that he keeps us continually agitated between hope and disappointment, between suspense and gratification; that he embarrasses what would be obvious in his plan, conceals his intentions with the view of asto-

nishing by their unexpected disclosure, and thus perplexes his intrigue for the purpose of pleasing by its developement.

That we dispense with the want of truth in these compositions seems to be on two accounts: that event towards which the subject tends, and those incidents on which it is constructed, are of that familiar and unimportant kind which, falling within the compass of common occurrences, are not calculated to force a doubt into the mind respecting their reality. We may also conceive them to have really happened, though out of the circle of our knowledge; for occurrences equally unimportant frequently take place without our privity. It is not my intention, however, to maintain that we ever believe the production to be true; but that the interest we take in it is never interrupted with the notion of its being fictitious. But more than this, from the manner in which the subject is conducted, our passions are kept in continued play, and our mind is so far diverted by a powerful interest, that it will not turn to this or any inferiour consideration. And should it even happen that these doubts, respecting the truth of what interests us, should arise when we are thus engrossed by our

feelings, their effects would be little felt among those sensations which more powerfully agitate the bosom.

It must be sufficiently apparent that the expedients, by which the novelist is thus enabled to support his subject without the assistance of truth, are neither resorted to by the epick poet, nor expected from his compositions; but it is equally true, not only that the epopee rejects the whole of the means employed by the novelist in effecting such an end, but that we should not tolerate such an end if effected. The fundamental cause of this circumstance seems to lie in the epopee exciting our pleasure by appealing rather to the taste, than by addressing the passions. And a justification of the preference manifested by the poet in directing his compositions to the former is deducible not only from the comprehensiveness of taste as a faculty, which occasionally embraces what is affecting and pathetick, as well as what is beautiful and grand; it might be drawn from the nature of those emotions which it excites, as being of a nature more dignified, exalted, and intellectual than those which operate on our passions. Taking this circumstance along with the further consideration, that every poet is

called upon to aspire at that highest degree, and that highest kind of pleasure, which is attainable by his art, it will ultimately lead us to a notion of the true epical character. And this notion properly followed up will eventually establish the conclusion of Tasso, and annihilate the force of the exception brought against it from fictitious history.

That the want of dignity in the characters of a novel, the want of greatness in its incidents, and of importance in its catastrophe, must incapacitate such materials from entering into the composition of epick poetry, is so self-evident as to appear unworthy of remark. The general character of that interest which fictitious history excites must place it, as being perturbed and passionate, under a similar interdict from entering into epical composition; as it is forwarded by a succession of those unexpected events and affecting incidents, which, though powerful in swaying our passions, contribute little more to the gratification of that severer faculty, taste, than to procure it a temporary variety in that calm and serious delight after which it principally seeks. Nor can any suitable gratification be promised to this faculty by

supplying that perplexity of intrigue which distinguishes the compositions of fictitious history from that simplicity of plan which we require in epical compositions; and which is a plan of that kind alone that we can find time to comprehend, from having our attention divided among other and interesting considerations.

The poet being thus excluded from sustaining the interest of an epical composition, by those means which the novelist employs in his fictitious subjects, is left no alternative, in affording that pleasure which is the end of his art, but what the nature of his composition, as being the most dignified as well as the most perfect of the works of invention, naturally suggests. And suitably to this character, he employs his subject, not in details of private interests, and domestick duties, but in the description of events of great and national concern, and in the display of moral, patriotick, and heroical virtues. That uniformity of composition which requires, that incidents of this rank should be followed by a close of suitable elevation; that unity of plan which demands that every incident should hang upon some principal event, in

order that the mind should not be distracted in keeping those parts together which are not simultaneous but successive; and that beauty of arrangement which exacts that our interest should rise rather than fall with the prosecution of the subject, are qualities which are indispensable in the epical plan: and they imperatively require, that the subject should be constructed on some occurrence of more than ordinary importance; in the completion of which the production should find its termination. In the state of calm and collected emotion, with which the mind regards those incidents of the work, which suitably to the dignity of its composition should be thrown into a solemn repose, it must sink under the weariness of a prolonged narration, unless this expedient is adopted. For a production, thus constructed, must be for the most part deprived of those little interesting tales of domestick happiness or distress, which uphold the attention by the agitation of the passions; and the mind must consequently feel a lassitude, unless it is kept alive by having the observation bounded by some great object; such, as the subversion of a kingdom, the establishment of an infant

colony, or the restoration of an exiled prince to his people and dominions.

An event of this magnitude must be represented as being conducted by some principal personages, and as having happened in some place and at some period. And these are the particulars which appear to exact that this event should be strictly historical. It is equally impossible to make all these circumstances wholly fictitious; to connect them with illustrious characters which are remarkable on account of being known, or to assign them the substantial existence of time and locality, without having on the mind a full impression of the subjects being so far contradictory to truth. And this impression must mix itself with almost every sensation produced by the story, and if not overpower, at least allay that interest, which the composition ought to procure, without imperfection or diminution; for the emotions which are excited by this species of poetry are of a nature too subdued and solemn to counteract the dissatisfaction which arises from the sense of their being improper and unartful. We have not indeed any reason to apprehend the influence of this consideration in those passages of the work which

are pathetick or terrible; for these, whether they are real or fictitious, are fully adequate to support themselves by their own interest. But such descriptions, if more than occasionally introduced, must interrupt that soft and equable tenour in which the action of the poem is advanced; from which the poet cannot so rise, as to preserve a continued elevation, and to which he must at times even sink, if for no other purpose than to give superiour effect, by contrast, to such parts of his work as are sublime and impassioned.

The conclusion which has been just determined is not only analogous to that established with respect to the historick epopee, but has been determined on the same principles. The poet who undertakes either kind of composition is constrained to preserve or to adopt truth in his narration, as in departing from the track which it points out, the deviation must excite such sensations in his readers, as will prevent their interest from arising, at least to that degree which poetry must aspire after, while there is a possibility of its attainment. And this consideration of the reciprocity existing between the historick and poetical epopee, as well as the nature of the perfection required in every

composition of the art, at once leads to the decision of the second question respecting Poetical Licence which has been proposed, for examination.

II. On being excluded from employing pure fiction, cannot an epick poem be constructed on authentick history?

For what has been already declared on the impractibility of departing from authentick facts in the historical poem, must evince that they cannot undergo any alteration, much less be falsified to that degree which would be necessary for the perfection of epical poetry; and that a subject consisting of them must be wholly excluded from its composition.

Nor can it be deemed unnecessary or superfluous to have reduced the points under discussion to this explicit statement, however it may appear to have been anticipated, in our inquiries into the licences admissible in the historick poem. Since the poetical productions of the French, our rivals, not less in literary than in military glory, furnish an eminent exception to the conclusion which it is intended to establish; the "Henriade," which is the chief epick poem that this nation can boast, being founded on a subject

taken from authentick history. But this exception, which derives no small weight from the extensive popularity of a writer of such general powers as M. de Voltaire, becomes additionally formidable when this very peculiarity in its composition is recommended as a perfection in the ingenious and sensible criticisms of M. Marmontel.

In the defence which the critick offers for his countryman against that comparison which he had been brought into with Lucan, (a comparison which is surely as derogatory to the Roman, as the apologist would lead us to believe it is to the French poet,) this circumstance appears prominent among those which are adduced to determine the superiority of the modern over the antient. "Lucain a suivi scrupuleusement l'histoire sans melange de fiction; au lieu que M. de Voltaire a changé l'ordre des tems, transporté les faits, et employé le merveilleux."[a]

After having determined the reverse of this assertion on principles drawn from the nature and end of poetry, after seeing these principles exemplified in the practice of writers of no common note, or inconsiderable

[a] Pref. pour la Henriade.

length of standing, my only appeal from this decision lies to the feelings of my reader, who in that notice, which he may bestow on these speculations, may be disposed to add his suffrage to the conclusions which I endeavour to establish. That this conclusion does not fail from wanting the support of high authority, would be admitted by M. de Voltaire himself, since the Abbé Du Bos, of whose critical powers he bears ample testimony, most explicitly declares that a subject from recent history is not fit for epick poetry.[a]

But it is still more worthy of remark, that M. de Voltaire himself, bestowing most unqualified approbation on Lucan, and strengthening his approbation with very convincing reasons, has not only supported the superiour judgment manifested in the "Pharsalia," but has most incautiously decided against that mode of practice which he afterwards adopted in the "Henriade." Nor is it difficult to account for this inconsistency between the authour's practice and his principles: in strict conformity to the latter, the poem was originally conceived, and offered to the world. It was not until after this period

[a] Reflex. Critiq. §. 23.

that the authour perceived the possibility of advancing the credit of his production, by giving it more of an epical form. Those sentiments, which might have discouraged such a project, had been made publick sometime before this intention had been formed, and if they had been remembered by their authour would have had little weight while he was occupied with the idea of realizing a project which was calculated to become more a favourite with any poet. However this may be, the writer's own sentiments, standing as they do at present, must afford no small confirmation to the opinion which is now risqued, that the authour of the Henriade, so far from demonstrating the feasibility of that undertaking which his unprejudiced judgment once condemned, has, by his failure in it, left a standing proof of the justness of those rules to which he is observed to run counter.

The progress of the epick poet, being thus restricted from passing into either extreme of truth or fiction, is left no alternative but that of taking a middle course between both; and this brings our inquiry to that last case in an epical subject which has been proposed for consideration.

III. And yet this single case to which epick poetry becomes thus limited, does not possess the merely negative excellence of being good, because there is no better, since it is adopted where there is no liberty of choice. Lying equally between the extremes of reality and invention, it possesses their respective perfections, and thus exhibits every distinctive mark of intrinsick perfection. From the authour of every work we demand that he should aim at the greatest degree, and highest kind of gratification, in his compositions, which is suitable to productions of their kind and nature. But the pleasure which historical and romantick poetry is capable of exciting lies under considerable restrictions. An historical poem, from the circumstance of being confined to the narration of recent and authentick facts, seems composed with the express object of securing the truth and dignity at the expense of the interest of the subject. A poetical romance, on the other hand, from the circumstance of being excluded from adopting an historical subject, seems laid under the necessity of supplying the want of truth and importance, by heightening the interest of its fable. Of course, the pleasure which the one species of

composition affords in the perusal, partially excludes that which we feel in reading the other; we have most interest in the one, most truth and importance in the other. This being the case, either must be deficient in that general pleasure which we can conceive to arise from their union, and which we experience in turning to them in succession. It is this mixed sensation of delight which arises from a happy union of both, that is to be sought in the poetical epopee; and this species of composition, being thus constituted of contrary qualities, becomes capable of imparting that greatest degree and highest kind of gratification of which the art is susceptible. And this union of such discordant ingredients, the works of some favourate artists have not only enabled us to know are capable of being realized, but have taught us to feel in the most exquisite perfection.

The epick poet being thus vested with powers to enter the different provinces of the historical and romantick compositions, becomes in some degree exposed to the difficulties which they have respectively to encounter. Of such a stubborn nature is the historical part of the materials admitted in his compositions that it will not yield to alte-

ration: and yet to the completion of the plan of that composition which is professedly the most perfect of the works of invention, and which ought to be improved until it approaches that highest degree of excellence which conception can form, no inconsiderable alteration of some incidents in the story must be necessary. In the difficulty that arises hence the poet is left but one expedient. He must take a subject of a remote period. He must, in fact, select it with a partiality similar to what the eye feels in resting on such objects as from their remoteness excite no doubt with respect to their existence; but of which, while the outline is perfectly defined, much of the peculiarities of their form, their colour, and their local circumstances, are left to employ the imagination by exercising it in conjecture. A subject chosen under these circumstances, while it secures to his composition all that importance which it can receive from truth, imparts to it all that interest which it can derive from invention.

That intervening point in the history of any people between the suppression of fabulous narration, and the establishment of authentick record, when the mind is suspended

tween reason and credulity, seems to be the most promising period from which a poet is likely to be furnished with such a subject. As this is a period which must be necessarily semi-barbarous, it is not only freed from the restraint of that affectation and refinement in manners which are so incompatible with the general nature of the higher poetry, but it seems most calculated to produce those important and daring exploits, which are best adapted to a species of composition professedly heroical. And as the character of such a period is that of being credulous, it must receive from this circumstance such a tincture of superstition, as will give it a connection with those supernatural agents, and that marvellous imagery, which add so much to our delight, by blending with that emotion a mixture of admiration. In the consideration of the antiquity of such a subject is included all that sacred awe which the mind feels in recurring to times that are past, all that solemn delight which it experiences in contemplating the venerable interest that surrounds and rests over human gran ur its decline.

But if the epick poet is laid under certain restrictions from which the romantick poet

is exonerated, he is indulged in licences from which the historick poet is debarred. To determine the extent of that power with which he is thus invested, it is necessary to remark in the first place, that he may claim the same liberty, which has been extended to the historick poet, of altering, omitting, or introducing all those incidents which are of secondary importance. And the only exception which can be taken to this licence is, that a want of verisimilitude in the practice may interfere with the pleasure which his productions are intended to confer. But from the circumstance of these incidents being unimportant, it is directly a consequence, that they are little calculated to strike the mind, much less to interfere with that pleasure which engrosses it when its interests are upon the stretch. From the same circumstance it equally follows, that we undervalue the authority of such incidents as facts, if they obtrude themselves under that shape upon our observation.

The same reasoning which has been employed to reconcile with verisimilitude, those liberties which the historick poet may take with the important incidents in his work, will, when a little extended in its application,

apply to the poet who engages in the more exalted and difficult task of pure epical composition; and here we may make use of the opportunity to observe, that the licences of poets of the former description are comparatively trifling when compared with those which may be assumed by the latter. In estimating the truth of any account, we must ever make allowances for the circumstance under which the object was beheld, that forms the subject of its description, not less than for the complexion of the person's mind by whom it is related. Striking objects which are seen dimly, or at a distance, are generally conceived to be enlarged beyond the dimensions which they appear to possess when viewed more closely or distinctly, and in proportion to their real magnitude we represent them more extended; for we insensibly accommodate our language to the surprise they excite, without any intention of falsifying our declarations. But as the sensations excited in beholding such objects must be further influenced by the temper of mind with which they are regarded, the impressions that different persons receive from the same objects or occurrences may be very dissimilar; and to this difference we must ex-

pect to find their respective narratives will be faithful. A person of a cool and dispassionate judgment examines an object in many lights; but one of a warm and passionate temper will be taken with it in that which is most engaging, and luminous. Under all these circumstances the truth of the represented object is not so much sacrificed as we may suppose, nor can we lose much, if any, of its true form, when presented to us through such a veil: for we readily observe, that the envelope forms no part of the body which it infolds, and that though it covers it does not conceal its proportions and figure. We thus judge of it, not by the mere exteriour, but by that form which distends and upholds it. With similar restrictions it is evident we receive those accounts which are conveyed to us in the garb of poetical fancy; expecting to see every object heightened or enlarged beyond the nakedness of historical truth. The same circumstances which establish a difference between the plain narrator, and the poetical detailer of historical incidents, must make that difference still greater with respect to the epick poet, who has comparatively little concern with real occurrences; who does not receive from his-

tory, but draws from invention, most of the incidents that form his descriptions. We expect that the enthusiasm which enrapts him, which directs him in choosing a subject, and which warms him in prosecuting it, will transfer its lights and shades to every incident and occurrence which comes within the sphere of its influence.

Nor does the decided superiority, with respect to those licences which relate to important incidents in poetical composition, terminate in favour of the epical poet, merely with the advantages just enumerated; the nature of those authorities on which such incidents are recommended to his adoption leaves him an almost unlimited licence of selection, where there is any room for choice; and without any regard to the testimony by which they are supported. With respect to those which are doubtful in their occurrence, or secondary in their importance, he may use the discretionary power of representing them as is most suitable to his purpose; and in exercising this authority he may regulate his mode of representation by documents of the most doubtful credit. In estimating the force of the different testimonies on which facts of an obscure and a remote period

are attested, traditionary probability stands nearly on the same foundation as historical representation: in both we are justified in supposing there may be some degree of errour, so that the authority of no one can be set up in opposition to the other, so as to invalidate the truth of that statement which is adopted by the poet.

In pursuing the line of conduct prescribed above, the poet is not less supported in his practice by reason than justified by precedent. The historick grounds which can be found for the main event of the subject of the Æneid, the settlement of the Trojans in Latium, are now supposed entitled to very slight credit. On the question of Æneas's having ever been in Italy, from what has been agitated, there appears to be most arguments on the negative side.[b] The Iliad, as being founded on the supposition of a war between the Greeks and Trojans, has been of late asserted[c] to rest on no surer basis, with respect to the main event of its subject: but in this conclusion the publick very justly seem disinclined to concur. On the truth

[b] See BOCHART. epist. num Æneas unquam fuit in Italiâ.

[c] BRYANT on the Trojan War.

of one very important fact, however, that of Helen's having been at Troy, during the time of the siege, considerable doubts have been started, and on high historical authority:[d] and this circumstance seems to justify a reference to the authority of Homer as a precedent in that mode of practice which Poetick Licence confers to the artist, and from which he derives a power of choosing what is most suitable to his purpose in facts of a doubtful or contested authority.

And hence it happens, that among facts which are thus imperfectly reported, or obscurely contemplated, the poet may insert many incidents, and even episodes, which are important, not less on account of the elevation than the extensiveness of their subject. For having imagined them with suitable attention to verisimilitude, he can have little to fear for their sufficiency to convey that pleasure which is the sole end of poetical composition. It is knowledge alone that can interpose her authority to remind us that such pleasure has but an imaginary reality: but knowledge has now no real objects to impress upon our senses, so as to dissipate

[d] Herodot. lib. i. p. 8.

the delusion; her feeble monitions therefore escape the attention, which is already engrossed by fascinating, though visionary probabilities. The licences of this kind, which might be exemplified from any epick poem, are those which place the most marked distinction between the respective provinces of epical and historical poetry; and so extensive a range do they open to the former, that they appear to place it under scarcely any historical restriction, but that of deriving from fact the main action of the subject, the actual scene of its transaction, and the principal characters by whom it is conducted.

CHAP. IV.

OF THE DRAMA.

ALTHOUGH among poetical productions of the highest order, the compositions of the drama, occupy but a second rank in point of execution, they claim decidedly the first place in point of effect: the emotions which works of this kind produce by means of theatrical representation being more powerful than those which can be excited by the dead letter of written composition. On the real temporary existence which is conferred on the ideal creations of the poet, by employing living characters to deliver his sentiments, and a visible scene to sustain his action, I wish particularly to fix the attention of the reader, as one of the chief circumstances which characterize the peculiar licences of the drama, as opposed to those of the epopee. By such powerful auxiliaries to narration as dramatick gesture and visible representation, more spirit and animation are added to the effect of the piece, under cover of which the poet is enabled to take many

liberties with the truth of the incidents on which his subject is founded. For though it may rather appear that poetry, in descending from her ideal state, and submitting herself to the test of the senses, may thus expose to observation those deviations from science which constitute all licences, yet this is far from being the case. On the contrary, with respect to those rules which are to regulate the dramatick poet in detailing his incidents, they may be generally pronounced to stand exempt from those limitations which circumscribe his practice who engages in epical compositions.

This will fully appear on prosecuting our inquiries into the licences which may be taken, in the productions of the theatre, with history, the science still under consideration. And it will be more conducive to this end, to distribute the subject of discussion in the same manner as was adopted in considering the licences of epick poetry. The following are consequently the points which offer themselves for inquiry.

I. May the poet derive his subject wholly from invention; or should he take it from history?

II. In founding a drama on historical

facts, how far is he licenced in deserting historical authority; 1. where the facts happen to be of remote; and, 2. where they are of recent occurrence?

These questions appear to comprise every difficulty which requires a solution in the different modes of composition which have been contradistinguished as historical and poetical; all consideration of the romantick species of composition in the drama being reserved for that particular section of this inquiry, which is appropriated to what is marvellous in poetry.

I. On the first of these questions how far the poet is liberated from the necessity of taking the subject of his poem from history, very different sentiments have been entertained. P. Brumoy maintains the negative of this question, and is opposed by M. de Voltaire; the same point, if I remember rightly, has been contested by Dr. Blair and Dr. Warton. In this state of a question which seems supported by pretty equal authority, some countenance is not wanting for him who places himself on either side. Influenced, however, by the desire of seeing Poetical Licence freed from every possible restraint, I feel little hesitation in arranging

myself on the side of those who maintain the affirmative. The reasons which apply to laying the epopee under similar restrictions have no reference whatever to the drama; and if this can be proved to be the case, the poet who acts in disregard of all such restraints has not much to fear from the attacks of any opponent.

The arguments which were advanced to prove it incumbent on the epick poet, that he should construct his poem on an historical subject, were fundamentally drawn from the particular character of his composition, which obliges him to address his work rather to the taste than to the passions. Suitably to the more serious nature of that faculty, I have already shewn that he is obliged to maintain an equable dignity in his compositions, and to preserve the easy tenour of the events, undisturbed by the bustle of intrigue and the continued agitation of passion. It is to support and interest the mind in the cool and collected state, into which a train of incidents of this description must tend to throw it, that he becomes necessitated to impart to his subject those qualities of importance and truth, which can be attained only by an adherence to history. But the end which

criticks have prescribed to tragick compositions, and which those poets have pursued who have excelled in works of this description, is materially different from that which is followed in epical productions. Suitably to the precepts of criticism, those poets who have excelled in tragick composition have almost exclusively aimed at moving our pity and terrour; those passions which exert the most powerful dominion over our breast, and which rarely mix themselves with those softer emotions that generally influence our taste. Nay, many of the poets, particularly among the moderns, have carried this principle still further, and have ventured to involve the drama in all that bustle of action, and intricacy of plot, which are calculated to quicken our feelings at what is pathetick, and alarm our apprehensions at what is terrible in its subject. Those reasons of course, from which it has been pronounced that an historical subject is indispensable in the epopee, have no application in the present instance; having been drawn from a consideration of the peculiar circumstances in which that department of the art is placed, they can have no reference to the drama, the

nature and end of which are of so totally different a description.

It may be however imagined, as every artist is obliged to aspire after the highest conceivable excellence of which his compositions are susceptible, that the truth and importance which exclusively belong to a subject founded on fact, as opposed to one drawn from invention, impose it as a duty on the tragick writer that he should construct his works on history. Without questioning the authority of the principle from which this inference is made, we may venture to doubt that the end which it proposes could be in any respect attained by carrying the project under consideration into effect. For a few considerations, it is presumed, will be sufficient to evince, that however a subject thus chosen might inherently possess such requisite qualities, as are here supposed to recommend a fable that is historick, they would become so weakened and altered in the representation as to prove incapable of heightening the effect of the drama.

With respect to the first and principal particular, that greater truth may be thus imparted to the drama: it is difficult to

conceive how any advantage can proceed from its purposed union with history. The impressive nature of representation places it above deriving any benefit from such an alliance: for, being sustained by visible scenery and living characters, it thence acquires a species of artificial reality, more striking than any known fact can have in the remembrance. That we are ever deluded into a belief of the player's being the person he represents, is not now asserted: for the mind during the period of representation is engrossed by circumstances very different from these, or any like considerations, on the personal identity of the actor or character. The question arising now is not whether this artificial reality ever amounts to theatrical delusion; it is sufficient, that it so far imposes on our belief as to make us sympathise with the characters in the representation. And this being once effected, the mind becomes at the time too impatient of interruption to be solicitous about any matter of extraneous or secondary importance; and such at every moment of the representation must be all speculations on such points as whether the dramatick action occurred at any antecedent period.

Regarding then the facts of the drama as being not narrated, but actually renewed; as operating on the mind through the intervention, not of the memory, but of the senses; as acquiring a species of real existence from representation, at least that life and existence which makes the most forcible impression on the mind, it is pretty evident, that the reality of its subject can in no respect be increased by the consideration of its having previously occurred. For, supposing this circumstance does affect the spectator, it is impossible that, while he is engaged by it, he can make any deduction from it relative to the reality of the action in representation, but that of its being absolutely untrue in that state wherein it principally affects his imagination. When we are moved by the distresses of a Macbeth or Richard, it is the fictitious hero alone that engages our attention, and excites our sympathy. The circumstance of such characters having been once real does not increase our emotion, or influence our feeling for their sufferings: for they possess no greater power over our passions than an Othello or a Douglas, who never existed. And when we drop the idea of the actor, and think of the real

character which he personates, it is evident that the only impression which the representation can give us is that of its being suppositious: for the more true it is that Macbeth or Richard once existed, the less probable it must be that they sustain a part in the dramatick action. And these considerations are, I think, sufficient to place the possibility of greater truth and reality being imparted to dramatick poetry, by means of history, out of the question.

If we have thus to resign the defence of historick subjects, as imparting no greater truth and reality than a fictitious story to tragedy, the chances are much against their being considered more suited to its end on the grounds of conferring greater dignity and importance. For it must rather tend to counteract than advance that powerful interest, which hurries the mind along with the course of representation, to transfer its subject from scenes of domestick misfortune, to those events of national concern which alone of the facts of history would give the drama the supposed elevation. A dramatick subject is sufficiently elevated as to its importance, when the sentiments and dispositions of its characters are exalted, and

their sufferings great and affecting. Though in the fortune of more illustrious personages such great epical events may be involved as the fate of kingdoms, and the dissolution of nations: yet of these the passions take but little concern, unless as they tend to heighten those strokes of private calamity, which affect the persons in whose fate we are interested, and which possess the most powerful influence over the breast, of which it is sensible. As we endeavour, by the mechanism of such springs to raise tragedy beyond its proper level; as we aim at making its events more general in their influence, and more dignified in their importance, we must proportionately abridge it of those little resistless touches of private distress which find the speediest access to the heart; and thus raise it out of the sphere, in which the generality of those persons move, who are to feel its effects by the sympathy which places them in the state and circumstances of the imaginary sufferers of the drama. On these conditions it is an object rather to be avoided, than secured, to place the drama and epopee on the same terms; and thus it is, that those reasons eventually fail with respect to the former, on which history has

been considered necessary to the compositions of the latter.

Against a position which is here assumed as granted, a modern critick appears to speak most decisively. After declaring "that tragedy prefers, or rather confines itself to such actions as are most important,"—and "that the persons whose actions tragedy would exhibit to us must be of principal rank and dignity," he subjoins, "that the actions of such persons are both in themselves, and in their consequences most fitted to excite passion;" and that "whatever be the unhappy incidents in the story of private men, it is certain, they must take faster hold of the imagination, and of course impress the heart more forcibly when related of the higher characters in life."[e] These are assertions which the authour in question appears to have introduced merely for the purpose of arraigning the modern tragedy as defective "in turning so constantly as it does upon love subjects," and on the distresses "of private persons;" so as, he adds, "to have well nigh annihilated the noblest of the two dramas amongst us."[f]

[e] Hurd on the Provinces of the Drama. Chap. I. § 3.

[f] Id. Ib.

Begging leave to deny on the evidence of my own feelings, which decide the very contrary to what the critick asserts, " that each of these conclusions is the direct consequence of our idea of *the end* of tragedy," I shall venture to oppose to his assumptions the opinion of one who may be surely allowed to have possessed no slight strength of judgment, and perspicacity in criticism. And it is a curious circumstance, that the critick, whom I now quote, has repeatedly determined the reverse of the above conclusions, in judging the works of Shakespeare, Otway, and Rowe, those poets who of all the moderns have shewn the greatest skill in swaying the passions. " The play of Timon is a domestick tragedy, and *therefore* strongly fastens on the attentions of the reader."[g]— " The Orphan is a domestick tragedy drawn from middle life. Its whole power is upon the affections; for it is not written with much comprehension of thought, or elegance of expression. But if the heart is interested many other beauties may be wanting, yet not be missed"[h]—" This play (Jane Shore)

[g] JOHNSON. Gen. Observ. on Shakespeare. Vol. II. p. 215.
[h] Id. Life of Otway. Vol. IX. p. 226.

consisting chiefly of domestick scenes and private distress, lays hold upon the heart."[i]

These are conclusions in which, as they are dictated by feeling, not strained from principle, every reader joins his ready assent, who has witnessed the representation of domestick tragedy, and remembers how he was affected by the exhibition. The fact is, that in tragedies which employ dignified personages to carry on the action of the fable, we are rarely affected by any distresses which might not equally belong to those who move in the middle sphere of life: if there is any thing great and magnanimous in the sufferings of such persons, it becomes doubly striking, from being less expected than in persons of a more exalted rank and heroical character: if there is any thing pathetick or terrible in their fate it must operate with double effect upon our passions, as lying more close to our sympathies. Any catastrophe more moving or terrible than that of Othello, will not be easily pointed out in the whole range of dramatick composition; yet it exhibits nothing which might not have occurred in the most private recesses of do-

[i] Id. Life of Rowe. Vol. X. p. 64.

mestick life: nor can it be easily shewn how its passionate effects could receive any encrease or diminution by supposing the persons who interest us in that drama of a rank more or less exalted. Neither can I think the critick acquires any support from the remark on which he founds his conclusion "on the absurdity," as he pleased to term it, of planning unimportant action in tragedy; that the interests of a whole community are involved in the misfortunes of great and splendid sufferers. Without employing any time to refute these unsupported assumptions, by abstract reasoning, we may produce from example a sufficient proof of their inconclusiveness. The "Samson Agonistes" of Milton stands perhaps without a parallel, as possessing a catastrophe which occasions important and extensive evils to persons the most elevated in rank and character: nor is it easy to conceive in what manner more could be made of the incidents which form its close, in heightening the tragick effects of pity and terrour, than has been accomplished by its authour. Yet who is there that, in perusing this drama, has felt his breast agitated with these emotions to that powerful degree which he must have experienced

when sitting down to some of the domestick stories of Moore and Southerne?

It may be however then demanded, if the representation of domestick distress and the exhibition of private character are more conducive to the end of tragedy, as far as it intends to move our pity and alarm our terrour, how comes it to pass that poets have manifested in their dramatick works a general partiality to dignified characters, if not to important action also? This question may find the following obvious answer. The principal end of tragedy is to move us to pity and terrour; but tragick compositions in their most respectable form are likewise poetical compositions, and must consequently comprise those means of pleasing which constitute the end of all the productions of the art with which they thus possess an affinity. Thus it becomes not more exacted by the particular end of dramatick composition, that tragedy should aim at possessing whatever can affect our passions; than it is inculcated by the general end of poetical composition, that it should aspire at whatever is calculated to gratify our taste. As the beauties of sentiment and of language contribute in no slight degree to the end of poetry, and as such are materials which form an essen-

tial part of the composition of the drama; when the poet neglects to secure the advantages that may be imparted to his subject from these sources, he must disappoint us of much of the pleasure which we have a right to demand from his productions. Hence it becomes a duty incumbent on him to give an elevation to the sentiments, and a correspondent dignity to the diction of the higher tragedy: and thus he is necessitated to dispose his language in a metrical form, and to enrich it with the embellishments of figurative expression. But that he may not wholly destroy our gratification, by violating propriety, he is obliged to ascribe such language and sentiments to characters of an exalted rank; for to such personages principally can they be assigned in conformity to nature and propriety. These are the considerations from which, as it appears to me, the poet was originally induced to transfer his subject from exhibiting private persons to displaying great and dignified characters: though the distresses of the former were more calculated to excite passion, they afforded not the same means of contributing to the spectator's delight, by calling in the resources of taste to second the impulses of emotion.

But let not these considerations be conceived to confer any general superiority on exalted subjects over domestick fables, as more calculated to promote the end of poetical composition. The principles now unfolded, when applied in their utmost severity, would reduce to an inferiour rank in the scale of dramatick excellence such tragedies only from among those which are founded on domestick stories, as may be distinguished by the designation of familiar.[k] There still remains within the confines of private life an inexhaustible fund of materials in every respect suited to the purposes of dramatick perfection. Nor is this assertion founded on a mere barren speculation: the works of our most celebrated writers afford continual proofs of its sufficiency. The "Romeo and Juliet", of Shakespeare, and the "Venice Preserved" of Otway, may be deduced, from among many of equal pertinency, as instances of dramas whose actions are founded on domestick distress, and whose characters are deduced from the private and middle sphere of life; and which, nevertheless, comprehend not only every effect of action and incident that heightens tragick

[k] Such dramas I mean as Moore's "Gamester," and Lillo's "George Barnwell."

interest, but also every embellishment of sentiment and diction that dignifies poetical composition.

For the security of that general conclusion which was formerly laid down on the question of an historical subject tending to improve the drama, I am further obliged to object to another tenet of the critick before us:—that "tragedy succeeds best when the subject is real."[1] Some assertions of the same writer I formerly confronted with the precepts of Dr. Johnson, I shall now venture to oppose to the present assumption the opinion of Aristotle, who manifests a general acquiescence in the conclusion I have endeavoured to establish in contradiction to this assertion. "In some tragedies," says the critick, "there are a few known names, while the rest are fictitious; but in others there are none, as in the Anthos of Agatho, where the incidents and the characters are equally feigned, and yet the drama *does not less contribute to our delight.*"[m].

[1] Hurd. ub. sup.

[m] Ου μην αλλα και εν ταῖς τραγωδιαις, εν ενιαις μεν ἐν ἡ δυο τῶν γνωριμων εστιν ονοματων, τα δε αλλα πεποιημενα· εν ενιαις δε ουδεν· οιον εν τῷ Αγαθωνος Ανθει. Ομοιως γαρ εν τουτῳ τατε πραγματα και τα ονοματα πεποιηται, και ουδεν ηττον ευφραινει. De Poet. § 18.

The learned critick seems equally at a loss for a proof of his assumption, as he appears in his decisions on the effects of domestick stories in the drama, in offering a trite quotation from a Greek comedy supposed to be written by Aristophanes, as assigning the reasons for this peculiarity in tragedy. In the passage in question, which contains a comparison between the tragick and comick departments of the art, the authour seems desirous of establishing the superiour advantages of the former, on the supposition of the general knowledge which the audience previously possessed with its subject.[n] But had our critick given himself time for a moment's consideration, he must have observed that this passage brings no support to his theory, as being not at all applicable to a modern audience. And however the poet's words may be regarded as a sufficient testimony of the truth of this conclusion when applied to ancient audiences, there

[n] —— Μακαριον εστιν η τραγωδια
Ποιημα κατα παντ'. ειγε πρῶτον οι λογοι
Υπο τῶν θεατῶν εισιν εγνωρισμενοι,
Πριν και τιν' ειπεῖν, ως υπομνῆσαι μονον
Δεῖ τον ποιητην. Οιδιπων γαρ αν γη φῶ,
Τα δ' αλλα παντ' ισασιν· κ. τ. λ.

is good reason for rejecting it even in this respect: if we consult a still higher authority we shall find no inconsiderable countenance in admitting it no further than as it appears to be the declaration of one who wished to recommend his art by aggravating the difficulties which attended the carrying of it to perfection. Aristotle, who lived at a period which brought to the Grecian theatre the most enlightened audience that perhaps antiquity could ever collect, seems to have been of a different opinion from the poet. After condemning the conduct of such writers as adhered pertinaciously to hereditary subjects, he makes the declaration which has been already adduced, and subjoins the following conclusions, which leave very little authority to the words of Aristophanes:— "It would be ridiculous to adhere too scrupulously to received subjects: since those fables which are known, *are known but to few*, and yet conduce to the delight of all."[o]

II. 1. To proceed to the second point which has been proposed for discussion, when

[o] Ωστ' ϑ. παντως ειναι ζητητεον τῶν παραδεδομενων μυθων, περι ϑς αι τραγῳδιαι εισιν, αντεχεσθαι. Και γαργελοῖον τοῦτο ζητεῖν· επει και τα γνωριμα ολιγοις γνωριμα εστιν, αλλ' ομως ευφραινει παντας. De Poet. § 18.

a fable taken from history is chosen by a dramatick writer, even it falls into his hands subject to no such restrictions in the Poetick Licence of altering its facts, as are binding on the epick poet. This I think may be made evident from the consideration of what has been just advanced on the artificial reality and impressive nature of dramatick representation. Could the mind acquiesce in being deflected from such interests as are excited by observing the action thus hastened to its event, it could find little opportunity, during the short period of representation, for attending to those defects which a leisurable reading enables us to detect in the epopee. And what has still more weight, among subjects of history, those chosen for the drama are of less general importance than those adapted to the epopee; and being of course less minutely known, their violation cannot be attended with effects at all similar. Of the events in subjects thus chosen, even those which hold the highest rank, may as historical facts possess but secondary importance; and over incidents of this description I have already shewn that even those writers, who professedly engage in poetical compositions of the

tamest kind, may exercise very unlimited powers of alteration and embellishment.[p]

This reasoning appears strengthened by the precepts, and illustrated by the practice of one of our highest poets. Mr. Dryden, speaking of the conduct observed by him in the historical ground-work of his "Indian Emperor," observes: "In it I have neither wholly followed the truth of the history, nor altogether left it; but have taken all the liberty of a poet to add, alter, or diminish, as I thought might best conduce

[p] From these considerations, strengthened by the subsequent authority which supports and illustrates them, I must beg leave to enter a protest against those conclusions of the Abbe Du Bos, which censure some liberties taken in this respect by Corneille and Racine in the French drama. See Reflex. Critiq. §. 29. The critick seems to lay great stress on the authority of Aristotle, which he supposes to afford him some countenance in this opinion. He alludes to a passage in the "Poeticks," where Aristotle censures Sophocles for describing the death of Orestes, as occurring at the Pythian games, (De Poet. § 44.) which the critick asserts not to have been instituted for some time subsequent to that period. But various meanings have been assigned to this passage; and from the context, and the general sense of the whole reasoning which Aristotle pursues, it appears that he censures this description of the Grecian poet as containing an improbable circumstance, rather than an anachronism. I cannot therefore think that the abbe's censure receives much support from the father of criticism: the passage which he adduces being but a solitary one, and at best but equivocal.

to the beautifying of my work: it being not the business of a poet to represent historical truth, but probability."[q] His practice with regard to the plot of one of his first dramas, "Don Sebastian," is equally deserving of notice, as it extends this licence to the utmost bounds which are consistent with propriety. This tragedy is founded on an unascertained point of history, whether the prince, who gives his name to the drama, did, or did not, survive the battle of Alcazar. The authour, taking the liberty of a poet, and choosing that side of this doubtful question which best suited his purposes, formed the fable of this excellent tragedy on the supposition of the prince's having survived the action. And in allusion to his conduct he declares:—"This ground-work the history afforded me, and I desire no better to build a play upon; for where the event of a great action is left doubtful, there the poet is left master. He may raise what he pleases on that foundation, provided he makes it of a piece, and according to the rule of probability."[r] The poet's practice in these particular instances, corresponds with the

[q] Dedicat. of Indian Emp. Works, Vol. II. p. 243.
[r] Pref. to Don Sebastian. Vol. VII. p. 295.

general tenour of his sentiments, when he speaks more at large on the principles of his art. In his "Essay of Dramatick Poesy," we find the same precepts recommended in a general form. "Sometimes the story has left the success so doubtful, that the writer is free, by the privilege of a poet, to take that which of two or more relations will best suit with his design; as, for example, in the death of Cyrus, whom Justin and some others report to have perished in the Scythian war, but Xenophon affirms to have died in his bed of extreme old age."[1]

Nor is the opinion hazarded above devoid of support from authority of still higher credit from being of longer standing. To the authority of Mr. Dryden, now adduced, we may confidently add that of Horace; from whose precepts on the means left a poet of new modelling old subjects for the drama without incurring the censure of being servile or unoriginal, his learned commentator draws the following rules. "Not to follow the trite obvious round of the original work; not to be translators instead of imitators; not to adopt any particular incident that may occur in the proposed model, which either decency

[1] Essay of Dramatick Poesy. Vol. XV. p. 327.

or the nature of the work would reject."[t] And here it should be remembered that Horace does not point out such historical subjects merely as had been left in common to the adoption of every poet, but such as had passed into the private possession of some antecedent poets. By this process of successive adoption, the incidents must have become doubly impressed on the memory; and consequently if a departure from historick fidelity could be recommended by Horace under the circumstance of their final alteration, it could not be possibly censurable under their original representation, if used with proper restrictions.

It seems not, however, to have been Horace's intention to authorise a licentiousness of alteration taken by any poet, in making the incidents of history, if they are of principal note, subservient to the caprices of invention."[u] Nor let his authority be urged

[t] HURD's Notes on Horace's Art of Poet. v. 131.

[u] The conduct of M. Racine, compared with that of Eurypides, whom he has followed in bringing the story of Andromache on the stage, may be referred to as containing a just exemplification of the precept by which this critick would circumscribe the practice of every poet. The "Distrest Mother" of A. Philips affords also an adequate illustration of the principle in question.

on the other hand as maintaining that there is an absolute necessity incumbent on the poet of deviating from the direct train of fact, for the purpose of creating differences between his subject and the history in which it is recorded; or for any other purpose than that of giving it a novelty, where it has been rendered trite and popular by some preceding poet. For this I can neither allow on my own part, nor on the part of Horace: such a mode of practice having been merely recommended by the critick to his countrymen, as they borrowed their dramatick fables from the Greeks, who had given to every story a triteness by repetition. In this respect poetry appears free from every restriction, and according as is most suitable to the end of the composition, or agreeable to the views of the writer, may adopt the fidelity of historick narration, or use the licence of poetical fiction. The closeness with which Shakespeare adheres to the details of most, if not all the authorities, whether authentick or fictitious, from which he drew the subject of his dramas, not to mention the exclusive attachment of several eminent criticks to historical fidelity, may be insisted on as a sufficient justification of this assertion in

theory, and illustration of it in practice. Sheltering myself under such authority, I shall venture to dissent from the learned commentator just mentioned in part of the censure he has passed on the "Cataline" of B. Jonson. The ingenious and learned critick has certainly misapplied in this instance his just and perspicacious exposition of Horace. In believing that the authour of that tragedy, as in the two first charges urged against him, was to be condemned for following too closely the historian and orator who supplied his subject, he applies to him a remark which, if taken in its utmost rigour, would have affected him only if he had adopted his subject from some antecedent poet.

II. 2. The mention of "Cataline" directly leads us to Shakespeare's "Richard II." of which it has been observed that it probably set Jonson that example of strict adherence to the authority of history which he likewise followed in his "Sejanus." And thus are we led to the consideration of the historical drama, which brings our inquiries to the last point which has been proposed for investigation.

And in the conduct of this department

of dramatick poetry, I cannot but think that our inimitable bard exhibits as strong marks of judgment as have been displayed by the most successful practitioners of historick poetry of the epick rank. The mode which he has adopted, of adhering literally to historical facts, is the most cautious, and least likely to excite disapprobation. The state of a subject taken from recent and national history, and of one taken from remote and foreign history, is altogether dissimilar: of the former, every spectator must have a very different knowledge from that which he can acquire of the latter; and the poet must always have respect to the spectator's knowledge, as he intends to provide for the spectator's gratification. In this undertaking little success is to be expected, when he commences by violating the generally received notions on popular and national subjects.

The case of the historick drama is in this view analogous to that of the historick epopee: and, thus, for a justification of Shakespeare's practice in his "Histories" we need not adopt the general modes of his defence. We are not to consider him in want of that apology which gives his merit but the relative excellence arising from a comparison of

his compositions with " that state of almost universal licence and ignorance in which he lived."[w] Nor ought we to consider this defence much strengthened by the consideration of his having lived under a *kind of light of nature* which exempted him from the written precepts of Aristotle, as from the rigour of a law of which he knew not the promulgation:[x] or that his practice is much extenuated by the circumstance of his having had no good model by which he might be led to the imitation of excellence, or turned from the perversions of errour. In the grounds of his defence it has been mentioned, but with no great success in determining the present question, that there is a perfect conformity between his execution and his plan; and that he is not to be arraigned for having left that undone which he never intended. This mode of exculpation rather removes the objection a step back, than sets it wholly aside. With any errour which is discoverable in his plan, a poet becomes generally and indeed fundamentally chargeable: and from the rules of

[w] Johnson's Pref. to Shakespeare.

[x] Rowe's Pref. to Shakespeare.

Aristotle, as far as they are supported by reason and nature, no poet can purchase any exemption. How far Shakespeare has accommodated himself to these rules, when taken according to their spirit and to the extent of their application, has I think been already made evident: so far so, indeed, that it may be summarily concluded that he will not suffer by any application to those parts of his dramas over which they profess to take any cognizance.

The observation which M. de Voltaire has made on the historical epopee, that it is a dangerous enterprise, may be applied to the historical drama: and it may be declared to be such as cannot be recommended to any writer who does not possess more than uncommon address in giving interest to what is known, and novelty to what is familiar in his subject. In this respect historical poetry of the dramatick kind is placed in the same situation as that of the epical; and a like obligation laid upon the poet who engages in either kind of composition to supply the natural deficiencies of the subject by heightening those parts of his work which admit of alteration or embellishment. Nor should it be forgotten, in justice to the apologists of

Shakespeare, that his extraordinary merit in this respect has not escaped unnoticed; and his power of gratifying our taste by heightening those qualities which are most prominent and most striking in dramatick productions, has been justly insisted on in the defence of his historical accuracy. With this object in view Rowe has particularly dwelt on his skill in delineating characters. And Johnson, with rather an apparent than a real difference in the grounds of his defence, has particularly specified his irresistible power in moving the passions. But here the nature of our inquiries, as confined merely to the historical incidents of poetry, reminds us that any discussion on this point should be reserved for another opportunity. And I think it may eventually be shewn, that the practice of Shakespeare not only falls within the verge of antient criticism, but that as far as Aristotle embraces the nature and extent of his plan, he yields very unqualified approbation to the practice of a poet, who indeed no where deserted the suggestions of nature, and rarely transgressed the decisions of judgment.

The historick drama, thus brought under the same regulations as the historick

epopee, and circumscribed by the same restrictions, claims an equal right to the same privileges and exemptions. The licences which the epick writer possesses over the unimportant incidents in his fable, extend with equal latitude, and on the same principles, to the tragedian; and allow him the liberty of altering, introducing, or omitting all facts of this description, as far as it may tend to increase the beauty, or heighten the interest of his composition.

Thus, according to the principles by which the poet takes advantage of any doubtful point of history, Shakespeare, in his " Henry IV," uses the privilege of his art, in making Hotspur fall by the hand of Prince Henry. The former, it is certain, was killed at the battle of Shrewsbury, but the authour of his death was unknown. The poet profited by this uncertainty, and ascribing the event to the prince, has considerably increased the general interest of his play, and at the same time has elevated his favourite character. In " King John," he has exhibited equal judgment in the manner he has represented the death of Prince Arthur. The account of this inhuman deed has been variously re-

lated by historians; and the poet, by making it the effect of an accident, has in a great measure removed the odium of his death from his uncle, and softened down the horrours of the transaction.

A still more striking instance of this licence, which has been pointed out by Mr. Dryden, occurs in his "Julius Cæsar." In this play, which, together with "Antony and Cleopatra," may be justly ranked among historick dramas, as well on account of the authenticity of its events, as from the fidelity with which the poet has generally adhered to history, both in its incidents and in their arrangement, the authour has placed the death of Portia some time before its actual occurrence. He was influenced to introduce this deviation from history with the desire, as has been observed by Mr. Dryden, of giving some shadow to the anger of Brutus, and thus raising a foundation for that exquisite scene which thence arises between him and Cassius. "If he has made Brutus, who was naturally a patient man, to fly into excess at first, let it be remembered in his defence, that, just before, he has received the news of Portia's death; whom the poet, *on purpose* neglecting a little chronology, sup-

poses to have died before Brutus, only to give him an occasion of being more easily exasperated."[y]

The justice of this observation will appear more evident on inspecting the scene in Shakespeare.

CASS. [z] Hath Cassius liv'd
To be but mirth and laughter to his Brutus,
When grief, and blood ill-tempered, vexeth him?
BRUT. *When I spoke that, I was ill tempered too.*

But again more particularly;

CASS. I did not think you could have been so angry.
BRUT. O Cassius, *I am sick of many griefs.*
CASS. Of your philosophy you make no use,
If you give place to accidental evils.
BRUT. No man bears sorrow better.—Portia is dead.
CASS. Ha! Portia?
BRUT. She is dead.
CASS. *How 'scap'd I killing, when I cross'd you so?—*

On recurring to the principles which have been advanced in this chapter to defend the licences taken by poets in the different species of dramatick composition, which have come under our observation, it appears that

[y] Pref. to Troilus and Cressida. Vol. VI. p. 241.
[z] Julius Cæsar. Act IV. sc. 3.

most of the deductions hitherto made in reference to the subject have been drawn from the nature of theatrical representation, and the end of the drama, as directed to the object of exciting pity and terrour. On these affections of tragedy I shall beg leave to detain the attention of the reader a short time longer; being induced to dwell upon these points not less from their proving that the mode of practice adopted by dramatick writers, in seeking such an end in their productions, is that which is exclusively right, than from their tending to smooth some difficulties towards investigating the nature of marvellous imagery which occupies so distinguished a place in both epopee and drama, and forms so extensive a branch in the present inquiry.

In exciting that pleasurable effect which it is the end of every work of taste to produce on the mind, it is evident that dramatick composition possesses some important appendages which tend to promote our gratification, and which are excluded from the other species of poetical composition. That accession of pleasure which we experience from scenick representation, the importance of which we can determine on comparing the

different emotions we feel in perusing a drama, and in seeing it acted, will sufficiently illustrate the point insisted on. But notwithstanding the power which theatrical representation possesses to conduce to our gratification, it is so far from contributing a stock of additional materials to promote the end of poetry, under all circumstances, that it may be looked upon as frequently forming an obstacle to its accomplishment. It may be considered as imposing an incumbrance which we are never pleased to see borne with such strength merely as is necessary to sustain it, but which is then only pleasing to behold when it is managed with such address as evinces superiour skill in him who handles it with facility.

There are tragedies which appear to contain a just exemplification of this assertion, and to point out the true course which dramatick writers ought to take in contending with this difficulty: and two very distinguished instances in point are "Cato" and "Irene." It must be admitted that these compositions afford a very high gratification in the perusal. It must be equally allowed that the dramatick apparatus affords us an intrinsical pleasure arising from the justness,

if not the expressiveness of the acting, the beauty of the scenes, and the splendour of the decorations; for these constitute the only entertainment we derive from pantomime. And yet it is generally allowed, that both of those tragedies rather lose than gain by representation; affording more gratification in being read, than in being acted. The common reason assigned for this seeming paradox, is, that those compositions are merely declamatory, and are deficient in passion. But this reason, though it ascertains what is requisite to our gratification, when we witness such dramas represented, does not explain how it happens to be so: and it leaves the principal difficulty unaccounted for, how our gratification comes to be diminished, when we should rather expect it to be increased: as it may be maintained that the action of the drama must receive more spirit, the characters more life, and the passion more efficacy from representation. The only reason which I know, that, comprising the force of this objection at the same time solves the difficulty, is deducible from the circumstance of there being a certain degree of incompatibility between dramatick representation and pathetick emotion. From which it seems to follow by a regular in-

ference, that passion, from being calculated to counteract this effect of exhibition, is the necessary end of the drama.

Whatever may be the advantages which representation affords the dramatick writer, they appear to be attended in some cases with corresponding inconveniences arising from its imparting to his composition a degree of reality which is at variance with the truth of the represented subject. We never sit down to any dramatick representation and suffer ourselves to be lost in the interest which it is intended to excite, without having our attention recalled to this circumstance. But it is in those plays, of our own and other languages, which consist in cold declamation that this doctrine is principally exemplified: in these we particularly feel that the expression conveyed by the representation is more strong than that imparted by the subject which it shadows; in fact the incident of the plot is regarded as mere acting, the idea of the performer engaging us more than the character which he personates. And the consideration of this circumstance must impress us with not merely a momentary conviction, but a protracted consciousness, that the whole representation is

untrue. Little indeed seems necessary for this purpose; which must be generally evident to every person who witnesses theatrical representation; for no fact can be true in its occurrence more than once, as I have already had occasion to observe, much less can it have a repeated occurrence in a place so circumscribed and so situated as the area of a theatre.

That no incident or description is capable of moving our sympathy, of which the strongest impression we retain is that of its being unreal, might be almost assumed as self-evident. But as the effect which is experienced from the representation or narration of purely fictitious incident, renders this assumption problematical, it may not be unnecessary to establish it by proof. To take an instance therefore for this purpose of the least exceptionable kind, that, in which the emotions of the human breast are affected by distress arising from the narration or observation of what is conceived to be real: we have only to impress the person who commiserates the state of the supposed sufferer with a sense that the representation is untrue, and his emotion immediately subsides with the discovery. When our sympathies

are powerfully affected by fictitious distress, we find they equally yield on the application of the same remedy. It is indeed a resource to which persons of a livelier sensibility are often driven, in order to relieve themselves from the pain of witnessing the imaginary distress of fictitious story. Certain pictures of virtue suffering beyond what we wish to believe true often force our feelings to take refuge from the painfulness of dwelling on such subjects, and urge us to a remembrance that the portraiture is a fabrication. There is scarcely a reader of Richardson, who will not find constant occasion to fly for relief to this expedient; who will not frequently experience this struggle between sense and feeling, and add his suffrage to the truth of those deductions. The resource to which he uniformly has a recurrence is that of believing the representation to be untrue; and the moment he succeeds thus far, it dissipates his delusion, and terminates his sympathy.

It must be evident from hence, that dramatick representation has a tendency to counteract dramatick effect in having a power to detect the want of truth in the composition which is presented for our plea-

sure. Regarding pleasure as being most intense when it consists most in emotion, and as constituting in all cases the end of poetry; this appendage of the drama must be brought under certain discipline, not only that it may contribute to the advancement, but that it may not counteract the very end of the art. And the only course left the artist in this case seems to be that precisely which is followed by the novelist; namely, to divert the mind from the sense of the representation's being untrue, by occupying it with other and more powerful considerations.

The means by which the dramatick poet is enabled to secure this end consists, as is admitted by common consent, in throwing more passion into the dramatick effect. And the sufficiency of such means in accomplishing such an end is easily evinced. The impression which we receive from feeling what is pathetick in the subject is that of powerful emotion: while that which we derive from observing what is untrue in the representation is nothing more than cold perception. The weaker sense becomes of course involved in, and superseded by, the stronger.

This position must be the more readily admitted on considering the effect of passionate language and sentiment when aided

by action and gesture, which is not merely powerful, but overcoming; and which has the direct tendency to engross the bosom so fully as to leave it insensible to all lesser considerations: of which we need no other proof than the agitation of our own breast, and the visible emotion betrayed by others. But the same position seems to follow by a regular inference from what has been already advanced * on the incompatibility of such a sense, as that excited by the want of truth in any subject, with that sympathy which is awakened by emotion. In those appeals from the feelings to the understanding, by which we seek to relieve the pain excited by the representation of fictitious distress, we acquire sufficient proof of the efficacy of the former in overpowering and superseding the cold deductions of the latter. For, if there be any force allowed to the conclusions formerly made, unless in such a contest this sense of the subject's being untrue is wholly obliterated, there can be no passion felt, and of course none to bear up against. And indeed the difficulty which we find in maintaining the ascendancy over ourselves, when hurried along the tide of our

* See page 134.

emotions, the immediate address which we make to truth to arrest us in the course of our agitation, and the feebleness, nay often, the inefficacy of her efforts to prevent us from being again borne down the stream of our feelings, contain very decisive evidence of the deductions now made respecting the contrary nature of the mental affections under consideration, and the tendency of the one to overpower and supersede the other.

The application of this reasoning to the solution of the difficulty before us is now easy, if not obvious. When there is no passion infused into the drama, it necessarily happens that more is given up than gained by the accession of representation: the action, the characters, and the dialogue losing more, by the union, in point of truth, than they acquire in spirit. Such tragedies of course please more in the reading, than in the acting.

But when the poet succeeds in infusing this spirit into the composition of his work by making it more impassioned, the difficulty which opposed his attainment becomes an auxiliary to advance it. The steep which formed an ascent to retard his progress, as he pressed towards the summit,

creates a declivity to accelerate it now that he has advanced beyond it. With respect to the assistance which he may derive from the mere scenick apparatus in promoting dramatick deception, I shall have occasion to mention it hereafter. But it is in the action and gesture of the performer that the passion of the drama has life and existence: it is he who speeds that impulse to the breast which the poet merely directs, or feebly commences. And so irresistible is the united influence which they exert in making our reason the dupe of our sympathy, that though they may not succeed in deluding us into the general belief of the representation's being real, they beguile us into a temporary forgetfulness of its being fictitious. In which circumstance we seem to have a sufficient solution of the paradox, how so wild and visionary a notion as that of perfect dramatick delusion originated, by which the judgment of so many criticks has been misled, and the practice of so many poets perverted.

And these deductions seem to point out the causes which confine the end of tragedy, as Aristotle has justly observed, to exciting our pity and terrour. For these passions are not only necessary to sustain the incum-

brance of declamation and exhibition, but are efficacious in heightening the end of the production by warming our pleasure into emotion: for in being the most powerful of which we are sensible, they are almost the only passions, which, while they are calculated to contribute to our gratification, have force sufficient to overcome the sense we possess of the falsity of the representation.

Nor can I close this section without observing, that the same considerations may be prosecuted to solve that point which has so much exercised the ingenuity of the criticks; how it happens that tragedy pleases by exciting painful emotion? Among the apparent causes of which we may mention the effect of theatrick representation in impressing us occasionally with a sense of the exhibition's being unreal; and of dramatick action in lulling us into a temporary forgetfulness of its want of truth, by swaying our passions. From the first of these circumstances, every facility is afforded the spectator in taking refuge from his feelings when they are transported beyond the verge of pleasure into the conterminous bounds of pain. And from the second the artist is furnished with the easiest expedient of exciting the strongest

emotion while he offers the least violence to feeling: from hence in fact those delineations of passion, which are comparatively weak, acquire power to affect us most sensibly; in a word, to touch us most, while they pain us least. And even when the poet ventures to exercise the strongest influence over our breasts, they both seem to multiply most those sensations which are pleasurable, and diminish those which are painful in the exhibition, by rendering the latter more transient, and the former more frequent. Thus they give us pain principally in the retrospect, or involve it in that grateful sensation which arises from the consciousness of our having ranged our feelings on the side of the oppressed, and given up our bosoms to participate in the anguish of the unfortunate. And these feelings operating with the more general one of pity, which is not of the painful kind; and aided by that interest which arises from the structure of the fable, renders the aggregate of emotion produced by the piece generally pleasurable.



SECTION II.

OF

MARVELLOUS INCIDENTS.

OF MARVELLOUS INCIDENTS.

THE circumstance which originally conspired to bring history into the composition of poetry, as it conveyed it in the mixed state of being authentick and fabulous, must have introduced into the art fanciful imagery as well as natural description. When poetry was first cultivated, history being committed to tradition must have taken a cast from the ignorance and credulity of those persons by whom it was orally transmitted; and hence, however it originated in matter of fact, it soon imbibed a tincture of fiction from the channel through which it passed. In the state wherein the general incidents of history were thus presented to the poet, he probably wanted the power and the inclination of separating in that part which he chose for his subject, what was fictitious from that which was fact; and, as he thus adopted a story which partook not less of fiction than of truth, the art even in his hands became

possessed of marvellous imagery from its origin.

But since knowledge has become more extended, and credulity has yielded to philosophy, we have become enabled to discover a sensible difference in the matter of the historian, which the fathers of poetry either overlooked or disregarded. We are able to draw a line between what is credible and what is false in his narrative, and thus come to separate what is fable in his composition from what is properly denominated history. Thus it is, that we become capable of fixing a standard by which the licences used in his descriptions may be ascertained; as he adheres to truth and probability we account his practice regular and natural; but when he deviates from them, and follows not what is history but what is fable, we consider his practice licentious and arbitrary; and that it is only with a view to the licences allowable in the art, that we permit him to take such liberties, may be easily seen from our judgment on the conduct of the historian; since in the works of the latter we pronounce all such liberties to be striking blemishes which do not admit of defence and scarcely of palliation.

Having determined this much, the nature of such licences as exist in this department of the art may be easily ascertained, and shewn to possess every necessary conformity to the definition formerly given of Poetick Licence in general. When the poet's descriptions are corroborated or contradicted by history, his mode of practice differs in nothing from that which has been discussed in the preceding part of this inquiry: whatever is licentious in the one case is licentious in the other, and is to be accounted for on the same principles. But when his words have no reference either to recorded or traditionary fact, there is no alternative left him but to follow nature, or deviate from it. In the former case it is evident he uses no licence; for he is an imitator by profession, and generally follows no other archetype but nature. This consideration should be of course set out of the case, as wholly beside the purpose of the present inquiry. The question on the nature of Poetick Licence is consequently limited to the last consideration; that in which the poet departs from nature.

In asserting that a poet or any artist deviates from nature, we cannot be understood

to speak with a reference to any particular appearance which she assumes in the external sensible world. In all such appearances, what we know under the term nature, is not to be found. Animals formed with a greater or a fewer number of parts than usual are properly denominated *unnatural*; and this term is applied to objects which exhibit but slight deviations from the general appearance of things. Any part of the human frame formed larger than the common dimensions; any limb swoln beyond the usual size, is designated by the same term. These examples are sufficient to evince, that when we speak of nature, we express ourselves with a reference to her general laws; and that it is only what accords with, or deviates from these that we term natural or the contrary. These general laws when systematized will, it may be granted, form what we should consider a science. When reduced under general heads, as they are to a certain degree in every mind, they possess the essential properties of such: being knowledge collected by observation, generalized by abstraction, and reduced into a systematick form. It is indeed impossible to ascribe them any existence but in science: when

taken out of this state and considered with a reference to reality, they form but a series of particular laws, which admit of numberless exceptions. The poet, in being said to deviate from nature, must be consequently meant to deviate from her general laws as abstracted, and embodied in science. Every liberty, which he takes of the preternatural kind, conforms of course to the definition originally given of Poetick Licence, as it is virtually a deviation from that standard by which this quality is estimated.

As to the object sought in taking such liberties, it differs nothing from that used where the departure is made from history, and consequently from that specified in the general definition: it must be made for the reasons already declared, for the purpose of rendering the composition more striking.

CHAP. I.

OF THE ROMANTICK EPOS.

It has been the fate of poetry to have had the same process which was applied to separate fable from mixed history, likewise extended to reject marvellous imagery from its composition. Thus some criticks, of no small reputation, have maintained that fanciful description, on account of its being repugnant to truth and nature, should be wholly withheld from poetical invention.

The general force of such objections to the marvellous fictions of poetry has been confirmed, rather than annulled, by those criticks who have undertaken the recommendation, as well as by those who have entered upon the defence of this part of poetry. The former have found fewer strong positions to be commended, than it seems to possess; and have not made any provision against the attacks which might be directed towards those points in which it is assailable. For, fastening on the powers which marvellous poetry possesses to delight every description

of reader, and observing this to be precisely the end of poetry, thence reasoning on the fitness of the former to promote the latter, they have concluded on its forming a necessary ingredient in poetical composition. And this it most assuredly would, if the objections of those who oppose its being employed to such a purpose did not leave that problematical which this reasoning assumes as granted; if in fact it was not questionable that marvellous imagery does contribute to the gratification of such readers as are capable of feeling a solid delight in what is natural and affecting in the art; an art which has been by many thought possessed of adequate powers to please without the assistance of what is forced and incredible.

It is to do away the force of the objections thus urged, and to show not merely that it does please, but that it has a right to please every description of reader, that they, who enter more actively into the defence of the marvellous, principally direct their intentions. And of the reasonings which have been employed to this purpose, those advanced by two criticks of no inconsiderable repute, are more particularly deserving of notice, as

possessing all the weight of being derived from high authority.

The grounds which the first of these criticks, whose opinions have been directed to this object, has found for the marvellous imagery of poetry to support itself, may be stated as follows. The poetical world is taken as true by assumption; and any fabulous system being admitted by supposition, nothing introduced in its detail is questioned as false by those who are initiated in its mysteries: especially if the fiction is agreeable to verisimilitude, and has shadowed under it some appearance of truth[b]. Though as no proof of any parity of reasoning, yet, as the circumstance may explain this obscure and unsatisfactory doctrine, I shall select a passage from the critick mentioned in the second place, but with some alteration in its meaning and application. "It is not true that all is unnatural and monstrous, as is pronounced to be the case in the Italian poets, because their subjects are blended with the wonderful: for if we admit as probable some stroke of

[b] Bouhours. La maniere de bien penser. Dial. I. p. 14. ed. Par. 1688.

enchantment, as the marvellous conveyance of Armida to the happy island in Tasso, every thing which succeeds that circumstance will be found natural, and suitable to our common notions of probability."[c]

This it must be admitted is a legitimate conclusion; but let it be observed, that it is but hypothetical; and of course establishes nothing more than that the second part of the proposition follows from the first. Regarded in this light, all that it maintains, is, that we shall believe the fictions of poetry if we can believe the mythological systems on which they are founded. But the difficulty is thus removed only by raising a greater: for it can allow of but little doubt, that where any marvellous production is submitted for our belief, if we have any hesitation in admitting its probability on the grounds of internal verisimilitude, we cannot admit it on account of any assumed principle, which is not only liable to the same doubts with the composition in question, but which, in that indistinct view wherein it must be regarded, cannot find the same support for its verisimilitude as is attendant on a produc-

[c] Hurd on Chivalry and Romance. Let. X.

tion placed before our observation with all its striking circumstances.

How the cause of the marvellous part of poetical composition has come to fail under this person who volunteered his services in its vindication, may be easily accounted for. He had the support of a favourite system in view. For having constructed a theory on a confined principle; "that truth is the test of perfection in all the sentiments of good composition, and that such as want this foundation must be vicious;"[d] on applying this principle to poetry he found it irreconcileable with marvellous imagery, that most engaging part in the composition of the art. To reduce the innumerable train of exceptions to his theory which arose from this quarter, and which ought to have shewn the critick the narrowness of the principle on which he built it, there was left him but the one expedient which he adopted; he established the title of poetical sentiments of this kind to truth, but to that species of it which, being hypothetical, may conceal a false conclusion under a just deduction.

The defence into which Bishop Hurd, the

[d] Bouhours. Ubi supr. p. 12.

other critick under consideration, has been drawn, in undertaking the justification of the Italian writers in the marvellous part of their poetry, is more specious, but not more conclusive: it is besides equally exceptionable from placing the matter under discussion in a wrong point of view. The object of this authour is to establish "that it is erroneous to suppose that poets expect to have their fictions believed; or aim at more than getting their readers to imagine their possibility."—That no capable reader is concerned about the truth, or even the credibility of his fancies; but is most gratified when he is brought to conceive the existence of such things as his reason informs him did not exist, and were not likely to have happened.[e]

To this theory we may all readily subscribe as far as it asserts, "that no poet expects to have his fictions *believed*; that no capable reader is concerned about their *truth*." But with respect to the remaining clauses, "that poets only aim at getting their readers to imagine the possibility of their fictions, and that no capable reader troubles himself about the credibility of such fancies,"

[e] Hurd. Ubi supr.

on which the strength of the critick's cause appears to be rested, they demand a little consideration before they can be admitted. It will not indeed require much labour to detect some latent contradictions glossed over in the whole of the critick's reasoning. In the different grounds which he assumes, he advances positions which, if they are consistent in themselves, and reconcileable with each other, do not offer any thing to the purpose.

As to what is advanced by him in the first place, it does not carry the defence of the marvellous part of poetry beyond an irrelevant remark; which after merely setting the difficulty, which it undertakes to remove, in another point of view, leaves it just as it was found. For how is the objection raised against the want of truth and probability in such fictions as the Italians affected by the remark, "that the poet has nothing more to do than to bring us to imagine their possibility;" when this is much more than any objector, or indeed any unprejudiced reader can admit they have effected? And this is so far the case, that the very remark, which is offered here in favour of those fictions, might be urged as justifying their being censured:

since it might be assigned as a sufficient cause for rejecting these improbabilities, that they cannot be brought to the standard of any thing which we can conceive possible. The instance which the critick before us has chosen from Tasso to illustrate a different position will at once substantiate and exemplify this remark; I mean the marvellous conveyance of Armida to the happy island: this fiction, it may be remarked, is assailable in its probability, on the very grounds of our not being able to imagine it possible [f] how any such occurrence could have happened.

As to what is advanced in the second place; that "no capable reader troubles himself about the truth, or even the credibility of these fancies;" and that "he is best pleased

[f] But the critick may have probably meant by "our being brought to imagine the possibility of any thing," our being merely brought to form an idea of it, independent of any positive existence which it could have had, or was likely to have. Thus we may easily form an idea of such an animal as a chimera, or hippogryphin, though we believe it hardly possible such animals could exist in reality. Taking the authour's words in this sense, what he advances in the second place is merely a confirmation of the present explanation, and must of course fall when the second position proves untenable.

when he is made to conceive the existence of such things as his reason tells him did not, and were not likely to exist," I cannot be easily brought to admit it. As the former part of this defence proves nothing, this part would prove too much. For it offers as strong an argument for our being pleased with all the disgusting improbabilities of Mandeville's "Travels," and Lucian's "True History," as with "the specious wonders" of Shakespeare's magick, his ghosts, and witches. Our reason tells us that none of the improbabilities contained in those works ever did, or were likely to exist; and yet we can bring ourselves to conceive their existence, as they contain no impossibilities in themselves. But however possible I may find it to *conceive* such improbabilities as men having dogs heads, animals walking upon the sea, or fishes building nests in the trees, it will require something more than a mere assertion to convince me "that I should not trouble myself about the credibility of such fancies, but be pleased with them because I can be brought *to imagine* their existence."

Thus it eventually happens that the marvellous fictions of poetry are left as unsupported as they were found by these apolo-

gists. One general objection lies against the different modes of reasoning which both criticks have adopted, and it reveals the difficulty which caused their failure. The one endeavoured to establish a closer intimacy between marvellous fiction and truth than their dissimilar nature would admit: the other aimed at severing that relationship by which they should be generally connected. And it is not less on account of having to regret their failure, than having observed the causes from which it originated, that I have been induced to venture another effort in its defence. I know of no means by which the grounds they have assumed may be prosecuted to establish the conclusions which they have failed in supporting; nor do I think such means are ascertainable; and for these reasons which I have just offered in shewing how their respective undertakings have miscarried. If therefore the vindication which they have left in this state is to be made out, I believe it must originate from a different view of the matter, and be prosecuted on different principles.

It cannot be admitted that we believe the marvellous fictions of poetry, for with respect to the machinery of Homer, however

consistent may be the system of mythology on which it is founded, such never happened to be the case of any modern reader who possessed a sane mind. Nor are we wholly regardless of the truth or credibility of such fancies; for they may be so unartfully constructed as to leave no other impression, but that of disgust at their absurdity. And yet, that I may advert to the original objection raised against this part of poetry, it may be admitted that they are neither probable nor true; for this is a remark very little to the purpose when such fictions are so constructed as not to force the sense of their defectiveness in this respect into the mind. It was neither probable nor true that Garrick was Lear or Othello, or that he suffered any of those sensations which he is allowed to have expressed with so much truth of nature; and yet our being able to make this remark did not prevent him from moving the sympathies of the most crowded audience. It is neither probable nor true that such persons as Fielding's Amelia, or Richardson's Clementina, ever existed or acted as we are told; yet this circumstance does not prevent us from feeling ourselves deeply interested in all they are represented to have done and suffered.

And the critick, who, by coolly adverting to this circumstance, would attempt to disturb the fascinating delirium into which we had forgotten ourselves while engaged in the contemplation of such characters, would surely not be requited for his pains with our applause either of his judgment or his feelings.

How it comes to be the case that we dispense with truth and reality in fictitious history, and suffer ourselves to be affected by the unreal representation of the drama, has been already shewn; the authours of such productions succeed in exciting emotions which are more powerful than the impressions communicated to us by the want of such qualities in their subject. The same principle, with little alteration, merely in the mode of its application, will serve likewise to account for the pleasure we receive from marvellous imagery, and to justify the reasonableness of admitting it as a legitimate ingredient into poetry, since it contributes by allowable means to promote that pleasure which is the end of the art.

What, in fact, the passions of pity and terrour are to the dramatick poet, those of surprise and admiration are to the fanciful

poet; they are respectively, mental affections of the most powerful kind: such as engross the whole mind, and exclude the entrance of any lesser considerations. How much the dramatick poet makes use of the former in contributing to our gratification in the closet, when he promotes our pleasure without the aid of representation, is a point on which I need not here enlarge, as it is admitted from feeling. From what has been already discussed, it is evident that he frequently attains this end at the expense, and in violation, of truth. It is by the assistance of the latter that the fanciful poet is enabled to convert to his purposes that marvellous creation over which poetical invention extends its powers. The intenseness, the novelty, the very improbability of every object and occurrence of the fanciful regions through which he hurries us, keep our mind under the perpetual dominion of surprise and admiration;[g] and throw us into that state

[g] We may here observe by the way, when too great a violation is offered to probability, as in the instances deduced from Lucian and Mandeville, how it happens, that the mind rejects as culpable the fiction in which such a liberty is taken. For when fictions of this kind are presented to us we cannot feel those emotions of astonishment and admiration, which are the end of such poetry, being engaged with a sense of their improbability:

of uncollected emotion which will admit unquestioned what has scarcely the shadow of truth. Our advancement in it may be compared to our passage through a wild, while under the influence of superstition and fear, in which every shadow, motion, and object appear to be not less real than preternatural. Our reason might convince us that it is our senses only that are perverted, and our reason may probably have this effect when we again pass over the same grounds: but reason itself must depend on the evidence of our senses, and in this case they determine against all her conclusions. These are effects which the fanciful poet, from adopting the superstitions of the age in which he lives, has literally a power to realize in his narrations, though in a weaker degree than they are felt in reality. And when he exerts this sway over our minds, we do not stoop to examine the truth or the probability of the

which sense being the most striking of those excited by the composition takes the fastest hold of our observation. And the consideration of this point adds no slight confirmation to the reasoning which has been deduced to account for the pleasure we derive from such parts of poetry; as it seems to favour the supposition, that, when the particular emotions of admiration and astonishment are not awakened, such poetry loses sight of its end, and affords no pleasure to the reader.

fancies by which he works our illusion. This is a task to which we do not turn, until we lay down the work, and the impression has subsided from the removal of the object that affected us.

I believe an appeal might be made to the feelings of any reader of a marvellous poem for a confirmation of this reasoning. Nor should I have any scruples to select in the first instance the "Orlando Furioso" as producing the effects on the mind which I have just described, if the cry which has been so unjustly raised against that extraordinary production did not incapacitate half its readers from feeling the beautiful wonders of its fictions, by leading them rather to doubt than to yield to the pleasure which they are calculated to excite. And this is not a matter of mere supposition; it may be taken, as proved, on the testimony of the authour's own countrymen, who, though they have condemned him for the conduct of his poem,[h] have generally admitted the delight which his fictions afford every description of readers. His great poetical

[h] See PELLEGRINO. Dial. dell' Epic. Poes. Opere di Tasso Tom. IV. p. 421-2.

rival and successour Tasso, not to mention our own Spenser, is an illustrious instance; who, though he has attacked the episodical structure of Ariosto's fable in theory, and rejected it in practice, has followed it in the boldness of its fictions with a closeness of imitation, that leaves us a convincing proof of his having regarded them with the common admiration of his countrymen.

I have chosen to insist particularly on the "Orlando Furioso," as the charges of violating truth and probability have been urged against the fictions of that poem with the greatest plausibility. If the reader will again acquiesce in our descending from the great examples so recently mentioned, we may have a more convincing and familiar proof of the principle which it is my object to illustrate. Some works of the marvellous kind, which have latterly acquired an extensive popularity, will probably set the matter in a clearer light, than any poetical work of the same description extant. I would be understood to mean those compositions which unite the fictions of the antient romance with the interest of the modern novel. These productions receive every benefit arising from a fair trial, as taking them up with no inten-

tion of scrutinizing their critical merits or defects, we turn them over with feelings so far disengaged from other interests as to be susceptible of those impressions which they may be calculated to excite. From the insatiable avidity with which we are hurried through those wonderful descriptions in which the modern romance abounds, and from the extreme gratification with which we confess ourselves to be conveyed to that eventful moment, when the charm is dissolved, and our expectations answered, it may be surely inferred that our sense of the falsehood or improbability is not prominent in the pleasure we take in their wildness and marvellousness. Were this the case our inducement to proceed in the story would be irreconcileable with what we experience and admit to be the case: we should in fact lay down such works as finding less to delight than to displease us in continuing the perusal.

These considerations, strengthened by an exemplification so familiar as to give every reader a power of deciding for himself, appear to me to establish convincingly some points which were assumed without proof at the commencement of this defence of the

marvellous descriptions of poetry;—that the sensations which we feel on being hurried through marvellous narrations are of a kind the most powerful and interesting; and that the mind which yields itself up to the influence of this imagery is too much transported to take account of the falsehood of those descriptions which work its illusion.

If we find it difficult to define the precise nature of these sensations, it amounts almost to a proof that they are the unallayed emotions of surprise and admiration. For the feelings with which we read those productions possess all the characteristick marks of these mental affections. They are emotions not only of that powerful nature which exclude the entrance into the mind of all weaker considerations, but of that captivating kind which contribute to interest while they delight us; a circumstance by which they seem to be particularly distinguished from other emotions. And they principally, if not exclusively among all the affections of the breast, may be wound up to such a degree of intenseness as will suspend the powers of recollection. While on the contrary the sense of falsehood or improbability having no connection with emotion or delight can,

not be felt, and either become interesting, or cease to be remembered: forming of course no part of that impression which we receive from the perusal of such productions, they afford the fullest proof of *the strength* of that emotion in which they are involved, and by which they are overpowered; which is a quality that particularly characterizes the mental affections of surprise and admiration. It may be presumed, that there is not any person who, after he has read such productions, does not retain a conviction of having felt those contrary sensations, which I conceive to operate in opposite directions, and who if he could recall any thing of the particular manner in which he was affected, could not even point out certain parts which he admired, though he could not describe the exact nature of his sensations; and even specify particular passages where he ceased to be interested, from feeling the idea of their improbability preponderate over the pleasure they were otherwise calculated to excite.

If there is any reader who has felt the force of such sensations, yet entertains a doubt of what may be precisely their nature and appellation, they may be identified on

the authority of one, who possessed not less a correctness of judgment, than a sensibility of taste, and ascertained to be the emotions of surprise and admiration which I have declared in the beginning. "These descriptions," says Mr. Addison, on the fairy way of writing, "raise a pleasing kind of terror in the mind of the reader, and amuse his imagination with the strangeness and novelty of the persons who are represented in them. We are pleased with surveying the different habits and behaviour of foreign countries, how much more must we be *delighted* and *surprised*, when we are led as it were into a new creation, and see the persons and manners of another species?"[i]

And hence there appears to be a point established of no small importance in estimating the justness, and determining the perfections of fanciful imagery; for thus the end of marvellous poetry is not only ascertained, but its conformity to that pleasure which is the general end of the art is at once displayed; and shewn to possess as marked a character as that produced by tragick composition: marvellous poetry intending to

[i] Spectator. No. 419.

please by exciting the emotions of surprise and admiration, as dramatick pleases by awakening those of pity and terrour.

From this reasoning it must appear, that marvellous productions, so far from forming a distinct class of poetry, are not more than accidentally different from that species of composition which may be contradistinguished under the title of being natural; and of course that they are not liable to any objection which might not be applied so as to affect the vitality of the art at large: as the same reasoning, which is urged to expunge them from the list of the legitimate compositions of poetry, might be extended to proscribe some of the most severe compositions of the art, on account of the striking similarity that exists between them. With respect to the resemblance that holds between it and the drama, it has been already made sufficiently apparent: they equally aim at exciting pleasure, and at exciting it by the means of powerful emotions, and frequently without regard to truth or reality. Between it and the Historick Poem (which is of all epical compositions the most probable and true) a like analogy will not be found to fail: for both species of composition, besides tending

to produce the common end of pleasure, agree in that one point which is of itself sufficient, and which only is necessary to constitute a similarity. In both, though truth may be deserted, it cannot be deserted whereever it is acknowledged as truth. Unless, in fact, we can be brought to forget it altogether, no violation can be offered to its unalterable nature. So that making due allowances for the different objects pursued in the romantick poem, and in the other species of poetical composition, they may be regarded merely as draughts of the same object laid down, upon different scales, by artists of the same school; in which, though the dimensions are unlike, the proportions are similar.

The right of adopting marvellous imagery which poets claim appearing thus capable of vindication, however licentious it may seem and remote from nature; and being chosen by him who engages in the epical romance as the ground-work of his compositions, it must be evident that with respect to the objects which he may imitate, he commences with a licence that scarcely knows any restriction. But though the space, through which he is at liberty to expatiate,

is not confined to any prescribed way, or regular direction, its extent is marked out by certain limits: he may prolong his course by circumvolution, but if he proceed too far on the one side, he must fail from losing that illumination which is to direct his course; if he push it too bold on the other, he gets within the sphere of that radiance which must endanger his Dædalian pinions. History opposes a barrier to exclude him from appropriating those facts which are committed to the preservation of its records; and invention opens a region before him, the most captivating objects of which are but illusive lights which seduce to latent dangers.

As to the invented incidents of his work, I have already remarked, and cannot insist too much on the point, that though he possesses great liberties of fiction, he does not possess an unbounded licence of invention. To fix that line of partition between those grounds which ought to be considered his rightful possessions, and those which are forbidden to his encroachment, is an undertaking naturally to be expected from him who professes to determine the nature, and to fix the bounds of Poetick Licence.

The rule of Horace possesses much pertinence in this undertaking, but is too general to solve its difficulties;

> Ficta voluptatis causâ, sint proxima veris:
> Nec quodcunque volet, poscat sibi fabula credi.
> De Art. Poet. v. 338.

This precept affords us some slight assistance in estimating the merits of a composition already finished; but offers us none whatever, by which our practice may be regulated in entering on such an undertaking as a poetical romance. To reconcile the marvellous with the probable is here recommended by Horace, but how this may be effected forms the final difficulty; and has been considered so very insurmountable, that it has been pronounced by a critick of great authority to depend on such art as cannot be communicated by precept. "Il ne me paroit donc pas possible d'enseigner l'art de concilier le vraisemblable et le merveilleux. Cet art n'est qu'a la portée de ceux qui sont nés poëtes, et grandes poëtes. C'est a eux qu'il est reservé de faire une alliance du merveilleux et du vraisemblable, ou l'un et l'autre ne perdent par leur droits. Le talent de faire une telle alliance est ce que distingue éminement les

poëtes de la classe de Virgile, des versificateurs sans invention, et des poëtes extravagans."[k]

Were the difficulty as great as the critick represents it, research in these inquiries beyond this point would be precluded. After disclosing the nature of Poetick Licence in the marvellous departments of the art, and vindicating the poet's right of employing it, it would not be possible to mark out the boundaries to which it should be extended, from the impracticability of ascertaining the precise limits to which fiction might be carried, without destroying the reader's pleasure by a sense of its improbability. The consideration of the difficulty which arises in this respect will at least justify the boldness of an attempt to conquer it, if it does not extenuate the insufficiency betrayed in the undertaking. With such a prospect in the event of success, I shall venture upon suggesting an expedient, which I am fond enough to believe adequate not only to resolve the *crux* started by Du Bos, but to ascertain the full extent of that liberty to which the artist

[k] Du Bos. Reflex. Critiq. § 28.

is permitted to advance under the immunities of Poetick Licence.

The expedient which I conceive adequate to the exigency of the poet in this respect may be thus laid down. In ascribing any thing to the operation of supernatural agency, its occurrence, though not capable of being accounted for as natural, should not be questionable as real, judging of it according to the creed of the poet's characters: and though not immediately admissible as true, yet it should not be negatived as evidently false, judging of it according to the creed of his readers. But as the reader's creed is now in all cases determinable, and confined to what we term religion; and as the creed of the poet's characters, if it differs from that of the reader's, is generally denominated superstition, this rule may be stated much more succinctly. In order that any thing marvellous admitted into poetry, should possess propriety and verisimilitude, it is necessary that its occurrence should be exactly conformable to the popular superstitions of the times in which the scene of the work is laid; and though not recognised as true, yet should not be directly inadmissible as false when viewed by the reader's reli-

gious notions. And this rule being observed, the separate provinces of fancy and reality will not only be kept apart, but, according to the precept of Horace, fiction will be thus brought in the nearest possible degree to truth.

The justness and comprehensiveness of this precept will be found to receive no inconsiderable support on being brought to the text of exemplification from the works of the most distinguished writers in marvellous poetry. To justify its being offered, however, as a canon which may be applied to solve some points of poetical licence, which a difference in practice among these writers has left doubtful, it cannot be deemed irrelevant to shew that it possesses every authority which can be claimed for it, as being conformable to those general principles which have been deduced from the nature and end of poetry, and shewn to regulate its various compositions.

1. To assert that every thing which is conceived to be true must be possessed of verisimilitude, is to repeat circuitously what is conveyed in a single term. But whatever is inculcated by any religious belief, or admitted by the superstitious credulity of any

people, those persons who are under its influence are by supposition conceived to believe true. Whatever preternatural appearance therefore the poet relates, however doubtful may be its occurrence, however physically improbable may be its existence, provided it is reported on the faith of some character in his production, it must possess verisimilitude in being conformable to the adduced rule. To such characters it must preserve every necessary probability, in "not being questionable as true." The difference between real occurrences and preternatural appearances, in a physical sense, may be as great as can be conceived; but this is by no means the case when as incidents they are embraced by the imagination, or transferred to the ideal system of poetry. The human mind has often no power to separate among its conceptions that part which is the effect of delusion from that which is the result of reality: it is even generally found to be most pertinacious in maintaining the superiour truth of the former.

But it is in the poet's power to represent his characters as deceived by superstitious illusion: and as he is required to ascribe them not just, but natural feelings, not to

make them philosophical reasoners, but to represent them as human beings actuated by human passions, such a mode of delineation will impart to his narrative not only great nature, but every necessary truth; as being most consonant to the fabulous cast of that period in which they are represented to have lived.

These remarks cannot receive a more perfect exemplification than in the following passage from Ariosto, which is not less remarkable for the propriety of its fiction than from the splendour of its imagery. The poet represents the ghost of Argalia appearing to Ferrau, while he is in search of the helmet of the departed knight, which he had previously bound himself to cast into a river that no monument of victory might remain.

Con un gran ramo d'albero rimondo,
Di che avea fatto una pertica lunga,
Tenta il fiume, e ricerca fino al fondo;
Nè loco lascia, ove non batta, e pugna.
Mentre con la maggior stizza del mondo
Tanto l'indugio suo quivi prolunga;
Vede di mezzo il fiume un Cavaliero,
Infino al petto uscir, d'aspetto fiero.

Era, fuor che la testa, tutto armato,
Ed avea un' elmo nella destra mano;

.Avea'l medesimo elmo, che cercato
Da Ferraù fu lungamente in vano.
A Ferraù parlò come adirato,
E disse: Ah mancator di fè, Marrano;
Perchè di lasciar l'elmo anche t'aggrevi,
Che render già gran tempo mi dovevi?

Ricordati Pagan quando uccedisti
D'Angelica il fratel, che son quell'io,
Dietro all' altre arme tu mi promettesti
Fra pochi dì gittar l'elmo nel rio.———

All' apparir, che fece all' improviso
Dell' acqua l'Ombra, ogni pelo arricciossi,
E scolorossi al Saracino il viso:
La voce, ch'era per uscir, fermossi.
Udendo poi dall' Argalia, ch'ucciso
Quivi avea già (che l'Argalia nomossi)
La rotta fede così improverarse;
Di scorno, e d'ira dentro, e di fuor arse.
Cant. I. ott. 25-30.

The occurrence is represented as happening to one who lived in the prejudices of an age which disposed him to credit, not question the truth of any preternatural appearance: and the incident described is of a kind which receives no contradiction from our religious notions. With infinite judgment the poet has enlarged upon the causes of the appearance of the spectre, and on the state of mental agitation into which the

knight was thrown. The fiction is thus brought to the very verge of truth; as a superstitious mind actuated by a perturbed conscience might have created the phantom with which it was affrighted.

2. As the poet's descriptions are intended to affect the reader, and as the reader's creed may be very different from that ascribed to the characters in the poem, a provision must be made against his considering the narrative improbable on entering into the feelings of the poet's characters, and placing himself in the same situation wherein they are described to be affected; for when the sense of any improbability in this respect predominates in his mind, the effect of the composition must be lost on him. And herein lies the necessity of the rule, that to the operation of spiritual agency nothing should be ascribed which our religious creed would reject as evidently false.[1]

[1] The most striking, and indeed only, instance of a violation of this principle in Ariosto, which would offend a modern reader, is that fiction wherein the poet represents a Christian knight, Astolfo, as conducted by St. John, the Evangelist, to the palace of the Fates. (Orl. Fur. Cant. xxxiv. ott. 87-92.) We must ever feel a disposition to question the existence of such beings as the Fates of Heathen Mythology, and particularly so

3. It is scarcely necessary to extend these considerations to a third case, that in which certain marvellous occurrences are narrated by the poet on his own testimony, as distinct from those which he reports on the testimony of his characters. Where the religious creed of the poet's readers, and of his characters is the same, great licences may be used by him in this respect. He may construct entire episodes; and conduct them by none but marvellous beings, even where such fictions cannot be supposed to come under the observation of any human personage in the poem; whence, as was before observed, they might acquire probability, on the supposition of the spectator's having mistaken some illusion for reality. A remarkable instance, though not taken from a poetical romance, is the interview of Jupiter

when they are introduced to our notice by such a personage as St. John, who, on being barely mentioned, suggests the grounds of that creed, by which we at once decide on the impossibility of their existence. I must here, however, observe that this fiction must have appeared much less defective to a reader of Ariosto's age, than it does to one of ours; as well because many of the Pagan notions were retained and incorporated in the Italian superstitions, as I shall have occasion to observe hereafter, and because the history of St. John himself was in those times involved in much obscurity and mystery.

and Juno in the fourteenth book of the "Iliad." No direct reason could have suggested itself to any Grecian reader for immediately rejecting this fiction as improbable, as it possessed an exact conformity with his religious creed: while the internal verisimilitude which it bore in its consistency must have offered him some cause to admit it at once, without delaying to ascertain whether its probability was supported merely by the testimony of the poet, or corroborated by that of one of his characters. This being the case, the pleasure which the narrative was calculated to excite by the consistency of the fiction, and the marvellousness of the imagery, could not have suffered any sensible diminution from the circumstance of being unaccredited by actual observation.

But where the superstitious notions, ascribed to the poet's characters, differ from those admitted in the religious creed professed by his readers; as, for instance, were a poetical romance at the present day to be founded on a subject interspersed with Saracenick mythology; in this case I cannot think any licence would justify the authour in maintaining any thing that is not supported, at least indirectly, by the testimony

of some character in the poem. When fictitious incidents receive no countenance from the creed of the reader, in order that they should have some title to verisimilitude, there should be room for delusion on the part of the person who is represented as affected by them in the poem. But from this circumstance an exception is entered against introducing into the poetical romance, such marvellous episodes merely as are carried on without the known intervention of some character in the poem. For the poet, having once established an evidence under one of the personages in his work, and brought it in favour of any imaginary occurrence, may thence deduce by inference all the circumstances by which he chooses to enlarge the fiction, provided they are such as might have probably attended the transaction; for in this case, adhering to probability, he preserves every necessary verisimilitude. Any marvellous episode in the "Orlando," the adventure of Ruggiero with Alcina, for instance, will illustrate my meaning; where the poet having sufficient grounds for the outline of the fiction in the superstitious opinions of the character whom he introduces, thence enters with every neces-

sary propriety into its more minute details, establishing the verisimilitude of each particular description on the probability with which it arises out of, and is attendant on the general transaction.

When the rule which has been now explained is not transgressed, it appears to me, on many accounts, that the end of the production will be answered, as the reader will be enabled to feel that pleasurable effect which it is intended to afford him. For to attain this end we do not claim of the poet that he should render his descriptions strictly probable. All that we require of him is, that he should keep the sense of any improbability in his narrative subordinate to the pleasure which it is intended to excite as marvellous. By adhering to this rule, the sense of improbability being allowed but a negative effect, cannot have much, if any, tendency to counteract that delight which we are disposed to feel in what is otherwise interesting in the production; and may be of course wholly overlooked while the imagination resigns itself to the more powerful emotion excited by what is grand and surprising in the composition.

That the most probable supposition,

which will arise on considering the state of the reader's feelings, is, that all considerations of the improbability of the fictions will be overlooked, may be more fully established from a consideration of the medium through which the composition is presented to the mind, and the state of the mind which is affected by its perusal. And here confining ourselves to the observation, that these productions are narrated; of the objects of description in every narrative we must have but comparatively faint perception, from the circumstance of their being conveyed to us through the medium of language;

> Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,
> Quam quæ sunt oculis commissa fidelibus, et quæ
> Ipse sibi tradit spectator.
>
> Hor. De Art. Poet. v. 188.

In the general improbabilities which might be urged against any marvellous transaction which is narrated, those must be wholly overlooked which our senses would discover, if we were not merely readers, but witnesses of the imaginary occurrence. So that it may be remarked by the way, that the circumstances of being merely auditors and spectators will render somewhat more proportionate

the difference placed between the poet's readers and his characters: if the former are assigned greater credulity, the latter are offered less to believe.

But the reader's power to observe any improbabilities which may be discoverable in these descriptions is not merely confined from the circumstance of their not being submitted to the scrutiny of his organs; it is not less confined in the circumstance of his having but an imperfect knowledge of all preternatural beings and their economies, even of such as his own creed admits to be real. All the probability which reason can attain on these subjects must allow of considerable limitation; he cannot therefore acquire that habitual facility, which experience gives him, of discerning at a glance the truth or improbability of things which are familiar from being definite in their nature, and frequent in their occurrence: he will consequently find no immediate evidence for rejecting those fictions founded on the creed of others which it is his interest in being his pleasure to admit unquestioned. The only certainty which he can reach on these points is that which his own creed affords him concerning the existence of the beings employed in those

fictions. If they are of a kind which his religious notions lead him to reject, the composition fails at once in its intended effect, by exciting a stronger sensation to predominate over his pleasure. But against any danger which may threaten the poet's fictions in this respect the adduced rule furnishes a provision, as it expressly states, that "nothing should be introduced in such fictions, which would be negatived as false by the creed of the reader." And hence, if the existence of those beings does not come to be questioned, our admitting every thing they are supposed to do, will depend upon the consistency of the narrative in which they are described.

This however is a statement of the matter, which sets it in a point of light the least favourable to the cause which I espouse: for it may happen that the reader may possess a temper of mind somewhat tinctured with the enthusiasm of the poet, which, independent of the interest he may feel in the production before him, will rather incline him to admit than to question its fictions. "Many," says Mr. Addison, in speaking of the pleasure which marvellous productions afford, "are prepossessed with such opinions, as dispose

them to believe these particular delusions; at least, we have all heard so many pleasing relations in favour of them, that we do not care for seeing through the falsehood, and willingly give ourselves up to so agreeable an imposture." [m]

The defence of the Italian poets is thus capable of being established, and those fictions with which they have enriched poetry may be maintained to the art, notwithstanding the endeavours of some modern criticks to bring them into disrepute. For thus, with all their licentiousness, they are reconcileable to those principles which regulate poetical compositions, and are adapted to that end which is sought in all such productions.

To one objection, however, they seem to be exposed, which I shall proceed to state, not so much for the purpose of shewing that it is not incapable of being answered, as that it leads to the illustration of some other peculiar traits in the nature of this extraordinary species of composition. When that pleasure, which it is the end of these productions to awaken, comes to be felt only in remembrance; during those periods when

[m] Spectator, No. 419.

the poet changes his subject to give it a diversity, or those pauses which we are obliged to make in the narrative, if for no other purpose than to observe the connection of the authour's subject; at such particular periods these fictions being viewed without those emotions of surprise and admiration, which they excite in the perusal, leave no impression upon the mind so strong as that of their improbability; and consequently suspend the gratification which should be continued unalloyed from the commencement to the close of every poetical production. And, besides this, it happens, that in fictions thus constructed, there seems to be no suitable provision made at first to engage them a second reading, when that novelty is worn out which constitutes no small share of our pleasure, and creates no slight proportion of our emotion when we give the production the first perusal.

This objection, it may be remarked by the way, seems to contain in it the seeds of every aspersion which has been cast upon the marvellous fictions of Ariosto; as those criticks who have ventured to censure that poet must have spoken after a reiterated perusal of his work, since these are feelings

which arise on a frequent recurrence to it. But I do not mention this point as a statement of the manner in which the Italians have been judged, nor do I insist particularly on it at present, as containing a proof of their having been condemned on an unfair trial. Their defence may be maintained independently of this consideration; for the objection affects them only when one half of their plan is taken into consideration. As the difficulties attending the labour of poetical composition must have led them to review repeatedly their own imagery, they must themselves have observed it in the same light with the critick: they must have thus seen how it was exposed to censure, and were hence probably driven to the expedient of devising some mode of obviating these objections. And from this circumstance, I cannot but think, originated those striking peculiarities which distinguish the poetical romance from the other species of epical composition; its being allegorical in its subject, and episodical in its plan. Such in fact appear to be the expedients which a little consideration suggested to the Italian poets, as affording a remedy for the deficiences imputable to these productions.

On the episodical structure of fable in the poetical romance, I shall have occasion to enlarge when I come to treat of the economy of poetical matter. I now particularly insist upon the allegorical meaning as that part of the poet's plan by which he aims at securing the end of his art, by promoting the gratification of his readers; more especially during the perusal of those parts of his composition in which the sense of his fictions being improbable might predominate over the pleasure excited by their marvellousness. In these it is curious to remark, that the truth which the poet finds impracticable to impart really to his subject, he aims at imparting figuratively. Thus leaving the mind employed in discovering the latent sense of his fictions, and tracing resemblances between its true and typical meaning, he engages it in such occupation as affords most readers no small degree of pleasure. And hence by keeping the sense of any improbability in his fictions out of our view (which he the more readily effects by giving them, as allegories, that artificial connection with truth which keeps some kind of verity always before us in the implied meaning,) he succeeds in diverting us from observing the

want of verisimilitude until he breaks upon us with a new train of marvellous imagery, and then overpowers us again with emotions of admiration and surprise. And when the sensations thus excited again subside, he prepares for us the same task of unravelling his allegories, to be once more succeeded by an interchange of similar delight and similar occupation.

It is, however, by no means my intention to assert that the "Orlando Furioso" is a poem which possesses a regularly constructed allegory shadowed under its literal meaning. Such a supposition is not borne out by fact: for, notwithstanding the labours of Valvasori, Ruscelli, Porcacchi, Toscanella, and Harrington, who have been at such pains to discover a concealed meaning in all his fictions, it would require something more than complaisance in any thinking reader to admit that their labours were not much more frequently baffled than successful.

Indeed the establishment of such notions on the uniform consistency of Ariosto's allegories is not at all necessary to the defence of the poet: it is sufficient if this figurative meaning is discoverable in those bolder fictions which are conceived to offer a violence

to truth and nature. And that this is a true remark, and will be found justified on experiment, we have not only the evidence of the poem, as interpreted by the commentators already mentioned, but the testimony of the poet himself, who, thus far at least, confirms the general voice of his interpreters; as he directs his readers [n] in search of a figurative meaning implied under his more marvellous inventions. And such parts of his poem are those alone in which the reader requires something to turn his attention aside from the sense of any improbability in the fiction.

It must, however, be admitted that the case is very different with respect to Spenser; in the science and continuity of his allegories he differs very materially from his Italian competitor. And his commentator, Mr. Upton, has insisted on this point in his defence of the probability of the "Fairy Queen" with very different success from that which has been manifested by all the fanciful expositors of Ariosto's "Orlando." The fact is, and it appears in a letter on the subject to Sir W. Raleigh, that he secured to

[n] Orl. Fur. Cant. vii. ott. 2. See also Cant. viii. ott. 2.

his poem this quality of being allegorical, by having originally intended it should possess it. And a letter addressed by Mr. Upton to Mr. West, besides the preface already mentioned, puts the fact out of dispute by an illustration of the allegories, and an application of Spenser's poetical characters to the principal personages in the court of Queen Elizabeth.

But, as I before observed, the establishment of this point on the figurative meaning of the poetical romance, would not secure much to the cause of Ariosto, nor much advance the merit of Spenser; as it assigns the works of both poets no other praise than that of being good allegorical poems. For it must be observed that under these circumstances their place of eminence is apparently, not really, elevated. It is advanced in the same manner as that of an object, which when set beside others of a size more diminutive is, seemingly, not actually amplified. As allegorical poems they may be entitled to all the merits due to works of their kind; but if this is the view under which the poetical romance is to be represented, and these are the terms on which its perfections are to be ascertained, it certainly

becomes reduced from these circumstances, and in no inconsiderable degree, in the scale of that poetry which ranks as epical.

Nor am I led to this conclusion by an attachment to system, from having any desire to exclude from the composition of the poetical romance, a regularly constructed allegory, on account of its being incompatible with what I have already declared to be essential to such productions in a state of abstract perfection. Such a plan, when prosecuted to a greater extent than what has been judiciously adopted by Ariosto, cannot fail to defeat its own intent, as it must tend to weary us by perplexing our attentions with a diversity of interests, and in an unremitted succession. There are few, if any, readers of Spenser, who will not admit that the interest which they take in the "Fairy Queen" is alloyed, and in no inconsiderable degree, by the spirit of "moralizing" which is prosecuted through the whole of that poem. So much is admitted by one whom I look upon as the warmest of his admirers, and the ablest of his advocates. "As an *allegorical* poem," says the venerable Bishop Hurd, "the method of the Fairy Queen is governed by the justness of the *moral:* as a

narrative poem, it is conducted on the ideas and usages of *chivalry*. In either view, if taken by itself, the plan is defensible. But from the union of the two designs there arises a perplexity and confusion which is the proper, and only considerable, defect of this extraordinary poem."[o]

And this difference in the conduct of the Italian and the English romance determines me to decide, without any hesitation, in favour of the former, as the more perfect model of the epos of marvellous poetry. Not that I admit either the genius or the judgment of Spenser was inferiour to that of Ariosto; or that I believe he was seduced from the right path, which was so successfully trodden by his illustrious predecessor, by any vain ambition to avoid his supposed errours, or to strike out imaginary beauties. This inferiority, on the part of our countryman, is to be attributed to the difference of the times in which both poets lived; a difference that operated as much to favour the end of Ariosto, as it did to oppose the object of Spenser. The manners of chivalry and its attendants, the fictions of romance, fur-

[o] On Chivalry and Romance. Let. viii.

nished the subjects of their respective works, and gave them propriety of truth. But it was the good fortune of Ariosto to have lived at a period, when they were as much objects of overweening partiality, as it was the fate of Spenser to have lived in an age when they were objects of unmerited reproach. Each found it his interest to pay a respect to the prejudices of his times: and while Ariosto had but to accommodate himself to the existing state of opinion, Spenser had to struggle against it, in treating a subject of the same description and character. How his choice of the romance as an epical subject, was notwithstanding judicious, as conformable to the popular prejudices in the reign of Elizabeth, may be collected, without any labour of deduction, from those letters on chivalry and romance so often quoted.

Thus it happens, by assigning its proper place and level to what is real and what is allegorical in the epick romance, by considering neither part perfect in itself, but the latter merely auxiliary to the former, that the defence of the Italian poets is easily made out. And thus we find it explained, how this part of fanciful poetry, though it has

met with many strenuous opponents, has found no adequate defenders. Both parties, as well those who opposed as those who supported it, seem not to have taken in its plan at one comprehensive view, but to have regarded it with a divided consideration: they have been led to regard it not as a whole composed of one principal with a subordinate part, but as a whole in which the parts were equally prominent. Thus regarding it as a species of composition as much typical as literal, they have been led to expect, that, in both forms, it should be equally perfect: that its more obvious sense should possess continued verisimilitude, and its more latent meaning be continued allegory. It cannot then appear extraordinary that under such a consideration, in which the object of these compositions is so completely misconceived, they should have exhibited so much to justify the censure of their opponents: and that their apologists, taking the matter on the same grounds, should have laboured so ineffectually in their vindication.

But if there are any of Ariosto's fictions which appear defective in verisimilitude, and at the same time inobvious in allegorical signification, we must attribute the circumstance

not so much to the poet, as to the age in which he flourished. He was only required to impart that verisimilitude to his fictions which was suited to the existing state of popular opinion in his time. That censure which arraigns him for not having done more, might be equally employed to condemn Homer for not having devised a train of mythological imagery correspondent with our religious notions at the present day. We must in fact admit the poetical systems of both poets subject to the popular superstitions of the age in which they wrote: and the credulity of that in which Ariosto lived would have admitted certain fictions as possessing every necessary verisimilitude which we now reject as improbable and extravagant.

This reasoning appears perfectly borne out by observing the state of opinion, not only when the "Orlando Furioso" was composed, but that under which every poetical romance, which has risen into popular estimation, appears to have been produced. As proofs that the enchantments of Spenser and Shakespeare were received with some sincerity, and admitted to possess some credibility, many parallel examples might be

produced besides the trial and conviction of the witches of Warbois. The æra of Ariosto cannot be considered more enlightened than that in which Bacon lived and wrote: nor can we conceive what light could have arisen to dissipate the credulity of Ariosto's age, when but half a century before him Dante was believed to have descended to the infernal regions, and to have witnessed all those marvellous occurrences which he has detailed in his "Divina Comedia."

I cannot, however, bring myself to believe that the state of opinion at present, though less calculated to favour the effect of marvellous fictions than it has been at the time when this species of poetry was most successfully cultivated, has tended to weaken the verisimilitude of those fictions, to diminish their intrinsick beauty, or destroy the pleasure which the works even of Ariosto or Spenser were originally intended to afford. In our more collected moments, during the perusal of these marvellous inventions, when occupied rather in reasoning on their defects, than in feeling their beauties, we are so far disengaged from emotion as to consider their want of truth and probability, we are enabled to take into account the different

circumstances under which the poem is now read, and those under which it was originally written. And though the allowances which are thus made may not raise the pleasure which a modern reader takes in such fictions as those of Homer, to that degree which was experienced by the Grecian who professed Homer's religion, it does not follow that a similar disparity exists in the pleasure which any one now takes in the imagery of the "Orlando Furioso," and that experienced by the first readers of Ariosto. Setting aside the consideration that the cotemporaries of Ariosto could not have had that unreserved belief in the fictions of the "Orlando," which those of Homer had in the "Iliad," the mythological notions of the latter are wholly irreconcileable with the truth of our present religion, while the fictions of the former possess at least the verisimilitude of some superstitions not wholly exploded among us, which if we do not implicitly believe, we do not absolutely reject. From these circumstances it is very allowable to conclude that the pleasure, which Ariosto's work at first afforded, both has remained, and is likely to continue at nearly its original level.

Proceeding from this remark, I shall now beg leave to enter my protest against an opinion which has been sometime fashionable, and which, if admitted, would straiten in no slight degree the extent of Poetick Licence;—"That the success of these fictions will not be great, when they have no longer any footing in popular belief;—and that no modern poet ought to revive those fairy tales in an epick poem."[p] Notwithstanding the authoritativeness of this assertion, I cannot bring myself to believe that fanciful imagery can have suffered much from the circumstance of our being more enlightened than our ancestors. For I find it difficult to reconcile this critical dogma with that general interest which the old poetical romances continue to excite on account of this very antiquated imagery. And if such imagery is found to delight us in a poem long written, I know of no reason why it should not in one which is recently given to publicity.

It is true that we should censure as unnatural in a modern poet many things which

p Hurd on Chiv. and Rom. Let. x.

we should pardon, though improbable in Ariosto, on the grounds of those allowances which are to be made for the credulity of his age: but it is not less true, that the modern poet by constructing his fictions with more art, and greater verisimilitude, may stand in need of no such indulgences. How far this is practicable has been already pointed out in those rules which have been laid down for ascertaining the justness, and directing the constitution of poetical fictions: and let it be remembered, that to these rules those very fictions are exceptions, in which Ariosto stands in need of palliation.

When the poet has secured these points, he cannot have much to fear from the scepticism or incredulity of his readers. Among readers of this complection as there are some of whom he can have as little hopes as ambition of making proselytes to his fanciful creed; there are others who will find that what his descriptions want in point of truth, is more than compensated in point of art; a quality that almost equally secures that delight which is the ultimate end of poetical composition. And

the more incredulous any reader is found, the more it must be admitted will his delight be raised at observing those fictions which his reason leads him to reject as false, represented with all the consistency of realities.

CHAP. II.

OF THE POETICAL EPOS.

We have already observed those endeavours which have been employed to exclude the poetical romance from holding any place among the legitimate compositions of poetry, on account of its fictions offering so great a violence to nature and reality. It cannot therefore appear strange that the liberty of employing a system of spiritual agents and supernatural imagery, to which criticism gives the name of machinery, should have been likewise opposed in the poetical epos: nor will objections to its introduction appear to the philosophical thinkers of the present day to be devoid of the strongest support from nature and reason. When this mode of reasoning in criticism first became fashionable, has been incidentally determined by the authour of "Letters on Chivalry," in tracing the declining popularity of the Gothick fictions and Italian poetry in England, in the sinking credit of which it appears to have been considerably involved. The period of so

regretted a revolution in our taste has been fixed at the time of the restoration; and the origin of those sentiments, which particularly affected poetical machinery ascribed to Sir W. Davenant and Mr. Hobbes.[q] The authority of these opinions had however no considerable standing, and with the exception of a few proselytes, among whom Sir W. Temple occurs, they continue to lose ground every day; among the last persons that I now remember, who appear to avow them openly, is M. de Voltaire: they appear to have expired under the feeble support of Lord Kaimes.

On considering the different powers of reasoning by which these opinions on the propriety of machinery in an epick poem have been maintained, and those with which they have been combated, the advantage now appears considerably on the side of the former. Of this I could offer a complete evidence, in producing the defence of the necessity of celestial intervention in the epopee given by Dr. Hurd. The length of the passage unfitting it for transcription, I shall beg leave to refer the reader to it, as it

[q] Hurd on Chiv. and Rom. Let. ix.

contains a refutation of the objections of two very popular advocates on the opposite side of the question.[r]

Without entering into the merits of the arguments of a controversy, which, as I am of opinion, has been decided much in favour of the affirmative side of the question, I am sufficiently attached to those principles which I have employed some time in illustrating, to believe, that by their assistance the matter may be put if not more appositely, yet more suitably to the purpose of these inquiries: in fact, that so captivating an appendage of poetry as its machinery, may be maintained to the art without assigning any unreasonable latitude to Poetical Licence.

The determination of the present question cannot be directly deducible from that rule, which has been given for ascertaining the propriety, and marking out the extent of marvellous fictions; for that rule assumes, as granted, the very points which it would be now my object to establish on the more solid basis of proof. We must therefore look a little higher for that principle which

[r] Hurd's Discourse on Poet. Imit.

leads to the solution of the difficulty before us; and this appears to be immediately suggested in the *end ascribed to all poetical productions*, with the consideration of which these inquiries commenced, and from which the rule alluded to is immediately deducible. However the rule is not without its use in determining the question before us, as will be made apparent in the course of discussing the point, which may be briefly stated as follows.

The end which every poet, and more particularly those of the epick class, purposes in his compositions, is that of procuring his readers the greatest degree, and highest kind of gratification which is suitable to the nature, and attainable in the execution of that work which he undertakes to detail. An appeal lies to the feelings of readers of every description, as evincing that marvellous imagery has some strong claims to be thought capable of contributing to this end. But more than this, if the emotions of taste which, in promoting this end, it is capable of exciting are not only of a higher degree and more exalted kind than any thing which may be attained in the epopee without its assistance; but if there is nothing in the nature of these emotions cal-

culated to render it incompatible with compositions of this kind, we may from these two points fairly conclude that it is necessary to the art, in being necessary to the end purposed in its composition; for without its aid the epick poetry must fall several degrees short of that perfection to be attained by its adoption.

That, in the first place, marvellous imagery is productive of a very great degree and high kind of gratification seems not to be disputed by those who object to its introduction in the epopee, on account only of its offering too great a violence to nature and probability. By readers of a less philosophical turn, this assumption will be admitted on the unquestionable evidence of personal experience. Nor can it be reasonably denied by those who consider it, without any view to the purer epos, as it occurs in sacred poetry, or even in the epick romance. But that it is capable of exciting emotions of a more sublime kind than what are attainable by the merely natural imagery of the poem, must be evident from the celestial nature and illimitable powers of those beings which it has a means of introducing into its action. Before intelligences of this

kind, all human agents and operations must shrink away when brought into a comparison; they are such as can scarcely be contemplated, even in description, without sentiments of such awe, if not of such terrour, as render them sublime to the most irresistable degree.

That, in the second place, there is nothing in the nature either of marvellous imagery, or of epical composition, which can render the one unsuitable to the other, is surely as admissible. An observance of matter of fact has never been expected in the former; such a qualification, if it were compatible with poetical imitation, would not be counterbalanced by its inconvenience to poetical embellishment. Of reality the poet is required to take no firmer hold than what he grasps in verisimilitude. But if he attends to the rule given for the conduct of the marvellous narrations of poetry, he may furnish himself with machinery which possesses the strictest verisimilitude. For among those celestial agents which he may employ in forwarding the action, and heightening the dignity of his poem, if he follows that religious ritual which is admitted by the creed of his readers, and is natural to the

characters in his composition he cannot introduce any beings whose existence and operations will not have the greatest probability: to admit their verisimilitude, is consequently on the part of his readers a matter of faith, not merely a matter of opinion. And this being etsablished, the hypothesis may consequently be assumed as proved, that machinery, from being calculated to excite pleasure without being repugnant to poetical verisimilitude, is necessary to the production of that end which is purposed in epical composition.

The adoption of machinery in the epos appearing thus founded on reason, and being justified by the practice of those poets who have carried the art nearest to ideal perfection, two points in the use of it require a particular investigation, as marking out the extent of poetical licence.

1. How far the poet is restricted in the choice of particular agency to embellish and dignify his subject?

2. Under what restrictions may he be laid as to the time of employing its intervention in the epical action?

On these points we seem to require some fixed standard, as a contrariety of practice,

into which an ill-directed imitation of the antients has led some modern poets, has left it somewhat doubtful, in the plain track which originally lay unperplexed before them, how they ought to act, and how far they are licenced in proceeding.

1. With respect to the choice of particular agents to construct the machinery of an epick poem, the authour of such a production appears necessitated to adopt those in favour of whose existence his religious creed gives an explicit evidence; and of whose nature and operations his religious ritual gives an express account. For the object of machinery being that of augmenting the dignity and importance of the subject to the highest attainable degree which is found consistent with verisimilitude, those intelligences, from the sacredness of their character, and unquestionableness of their existence, must unite the greatest possible truth with the most awful majesty. And consequently the subject in which, to their exclusion, beings are introduced of a subordinate nature, must be at least one degree remote from abstract perfection, and would be capable of still farther amplification by admitting those of

a more exalted rank and certain existence to take a part in its action.

Under this principle a positive exception is entered against conducting the machinery of an epick poem by means of Pagan divinities, or allegorical personages: though the former is recommended by the opinion of an eminent French critick,* and the latter by the practice of a no less eminent poet of the same nation. In thus opposing the authority of the Abbé Du Bos, and the practice of M. de Voltaire, I shall fortify my opinion of the practice in question being carried beyond the limits of poetical licence, by the authority of Tasso, who was as superiour a critick to the one, as he was decidedly a finer poet than the other. Having deduced the requisiteness of machinery in the epopee, from the necessity of giving to such compositions all the delight which the marvellous is found to excite, against the propriety of employing heathen machinery to this purpose he deduces the following conclusion, which I look upon to be of itself unanswerable:—Non po-

* Du Bos. Reflex. Critiq. § 25. 28. M. Boileau has also been a most zealous advocate of Pagan machinery. L'Art. Poet. C. III.

tendo questi miracoli essere opperati da virtù naturale, é necessario che alla virtù sopranaturale ci rivolgiamo, é rivolgandoci alle deità de' Gentili, subito cessa il verisimile, perchè non può esser verisimile agli uomini nostri quello, che é da lor tenuto non solo falso mà impossibile.[t]

It is scarcely necessary to demonstrate any farther the impropriety of Pagan machinery in a formal selection of passages to prove it as devoid of grace in the execution, as it is incompatible with art in theory. The striking deformities of such a system will be more clearly evinced by a general exemplification from the "Lusiad" of Camoens; in the conduct of which poem so gross a violation of the principles of composition is betrayed, that it has become very problematical, in the opinion of many criticks, whether it ought not to be wholly expunged from the list of epical productions.

The first book of this poem opens with a council of the Pagan deities,[u] where Jupiter foretels the event of the expedition undertaken by Vasco de Gama; the success of which appears to have an enemy in Bacchus,

[t] Dell' Art. Poet. Discors. I. [u] Cant. I. est. 20-36.

and an advocate in Venus. In pursuance of the sentiments thus declared, the former deity raises every obstacle in his power to the success of the Lusians: on their arrival at Mozambique he excites the regent against them, and prevails on him to concert plots and form ambushes for their destruction:[v] with the assistance of Neptune, and the deities of the sea, he raises a tempest to destroy their fleet, after their departure from Melinda:[w] frustrated in his attempts in this quarter he exerts all his powers to excite opposition among the inhabitants of Calicut,[x] and with the aid of the infernal dæmons inflames the Moors with hatred to the adventurers. On the other hand Venus is equally active in thwarting his projects: she prevails on the nymphs of the sea to assist her in preserving her favourites from the snares that encompassed them at Mombaze:[y] she intercedes with Jupiter in their behalf, who permits Mercury to appear in a dream to Gama, to warn him of the intended treachery, and point out a friendly harbour:[z] with the

[v] Cant. I. est. 73-82. [w] Cant. III. est. 6. l. 5-38.
[x] Cant. VIII. est. 47-51. [y] Cant. II. est. 18. l. 5-24.
[z] Cant. II. est. 33-64.

aid of her nymphs she stills the tempest which had been raised by Bacchus on their voyage from Melinda,[a] brings Vasco through all his difficulties at Calicut,[b] and finally conducts him in triumph to her own retreat in the Island of Love.[c] The goddess of the sea here meets Gama, and commits the dominion of her empire to him:[d] the achievements and settlement of the Portuguese in the east are foretold at one of her feasts,[e] and the poem closes with her leading him to the summit of a mountain, explaining the system of the universe, and describing the several divisions of the globe.[f]

So far the machinery of the poem, though improper from its incongruity with the religion of the adventurers, is consistent in itself. But in addition to the fundamental errour of choosing a system of preternatural agency thus exceptionable, the poet has fallen into a still greater impropriety, in confounding this system with that which was inculcated by the creed of his heroes. One of the great objects of the voyage thus fa-

[a] Cant. VI. est. 85-92.
[b] Cant. VIII. est. 64.
[c] Cant. IX. est. 18 & 49-53.
[d] Cant. IX. est. 85.
[e] Cant. X. est. 10-74.
[f] Cant. X. est. 77-143. l. 3.

voured by Jupiter, and furthered by the assistance of Venus, is represented to be the propagation of the Gospel.[g] Gama, and his followers, are true and pious Christians: at the commencement of the voyage they are described as addressing their prayers to the Almighty, imploring his assistance in their undertaking, and joining in the rites and ceremonies of the Christian worship.[h] Amid their distress in the dreadful tempest off Melinda, Gama again addresses the Supreme Being, seeking his aid who led his chosen race in safety through the Red Sea, and preserved his servant Paul from shipwreck.[i] It is to be observed, that in answer to these supplications Venus almost immediately appears.[k] Even the personages of the heathen agency are at times made to refer to the characters and customs of both the Christian and Mahometan worship. Jupiter and Bacchus often mention the Mahometans, their prophet, and their Koran:[l] and Thetis the

[g] See particularly Camoens' Apostrophe to the Europeans. Cant. VII. est. 14 & 15. and Cant. X. est. 119.

[h] Cant. IV. est. 86 & 87.

[i] Cant. VI. est. 81 & 82. [k] Cant. VI. est. 85.

[l] Jupiter, in his speech to Venus, Canto II, alludes to the subjection of "the stern-browed Turk."

Os Turcos bellacissimos, e duros.

goddess of the sea, in describing the country of the east to Gama, introduces the adven-

And again,

Do MOURO alli veraõ, que á luz extrema
Do falso MAFAMEDE ao ceo blasphema.

Est. 50.

There shall the Moors, blaspheming, sink in death,
And curse their prophet with their parting breath.

MICKLE.

We even find Bacchus assuming the appearance of a Christian priest, in order to deceive the Lusians.

Mas àquelle que sempre, &c.
Estava em huma casa da Cidade
Com rosto humano, e hábito fingido,
Monstrando-se Christiao, é fabricava
Hum altar sumptuoso que adorava.

Alli tinha em retrato affigurada
Do alto e Sancto Espirìto a pentura:
A candida Pombinha debuxada
Sobre a unica Phenix Virgem pura.
A companhia santa está pintada
Das doze, taõ torvados na figura,
Como os que, só das linguas que cahíram
De fogo, varias linguas referiram.

Cant. II. est 10 & 11.

But he, whose, &c.
Now in the town his guileful rage employed,
A Christian priest he seemed; a sumptuous shrine
He rear'd, and tended with the rites divine;
O'er the fair altar waved the cross on high
Upheld by angels leaning from the sky,
Descending o'er the virgin's sacred head
So white, so pure, the Holy Spirit spread

tures and death of St. Thomas, in his mission among its natives.[m] She particularizes the preaching of the Gospel, and the fixing of the cross in India.[n]

It is not to be supposed that faults so conspicuous should have escaped condemnation. They have in fact experienced all the severity of criticism, and seem, until lately, when they found an advocate in the ingenious and elegant Mr. Mickle, to have sunk under the weight of universal censure. As the popularity of this apologist has thrown a temporary veil over these irregularities, and as the inquiry may lead to an elucidation of the general maxims laid down on this subject, it may not be considered remote from our purpose to examine his defence: though I think he has exhibited less judgment in the grounds he has chosen to extenuate his authour's errours, than he has displayed taste in bringing to light his various beauties.

The substance of his defence of Camoens'

The dove-like pictured wings so pure, so white,
And hovering o'er the chosen twelve, alight
The tongues of hallowed fire.

MICKLE.

[m] Cant. X. est. 108. & 5-119.

[n] See Cant. X. est. 119. & est. 140.

pagan machinery may be reduced to the three following heads:—That it is allegorical; that the introduction of pagan deities has been general; and that some of the supernatural characters in "The Lusiad" were believed to exist by the popular credulity of the sixteenth century.

In his endeavours to maintain the first point, and prove the allegorical significance of the several characters in the machinery, the apologist seems to have laboured with little effect. The latent meaning into which he wishes to explain away some of these agents, even were it admitted, would not substanstiate his assertion of their being allegorical. Thus, when he describes the Jupiter of "The Lusiads," as "The Lord of Fate;" when he makes Bacchus "the evil dæmon or genius of Mohammedism, who was worshipped in the east," and Mercury "the messenger of heaven," he still retains to these beings a personal existence, and converts their nature merely by endowing them with characters and attributes equally as substantial as those for which he has exchanged them. Those fictions only can be called allegorical which comprehend under their open and typified meaning, things essen-

tially different in their nature; as for instance, when they represent abstract ideas by actual agents. Thus the actions of Talus, in the "Fairy Queen," are figurative of the general idea of Justice; in like manner the departure of the people of Israel from Egypt, the subsequent protection granted them by the Deity, and his final desertion of them, is shadowed under the image of a vine, and the description forms a perfect allegory. But this is not the case where one deity is substituted for another. Allegory, as far at least as it is employed in poetical purposes, only aims at giving an apparent existence to what possesses no existence in reality; but does not extend to the implied representation of one being by another, whose existence is on the same footing, in respect to its certainty. In this view, therefore, the censure that has fallen on these supernatural agents in "The Lusiads" has not been removed by the explanation of the apologist: were his attempt established, he would only do away the imputation of the poet's having introduced such agents as were contradictory to the opinions of his age, by converting them into existences equally actual, and equally unaccredited by the same belief.

But were we even not to insist on this point, we still could not acquiesce in his having established a continued allegory. Beyond one or two instances there is not a shadow of resemblance between the characters as described by the poet, and those qualities which they are asserted by the apologist to represent: and even in these instances the resemblance strikes only at a distance, and on a general view, but fades on a close inspection. We might be brought to admit the general resemblance between the character of Venus and the quality of heavenly love. But how can we reconcile with such a quality the minute details of her person and actions, or the employments of herself and her nymphs, which are directly contradictory to the character of celestial love, and which are so accurately distinguished by the poet. These circumstantial descriptions are not only repugnant to this general character,° but, by their exact coincidence with the pa-

° As for instance, when the birth of Venus is particularized as proceeding from the ocean. See Cant. II. est. 19, and Cant. IX. est. . The entire episode in this last mentioned Canto, which describes her meeting with Cupid, is utterly repugnant to the supposition of her representing such a character.

gan representations of the same personage, would still continue, though allowed their figurative meaning, to create a discordant mixture of religious belief. For as they prove the identity of the Venus of the Portuguese poet with the Venus of The Iliad and Æneid, they would also reduce to the same identity their allegorical signification. The Venus of both ages would in this manner be brought to represent heavenly love: and thus the celestial interference believed by pagan ignorance would be confounded with the superintending Providence inculcated by divine truth.

But this attempt of the apologist to reduce the actual agency of the superiour beings in "The Lusiads" to the unsubstantial ministration of abstract idea, is open to a still stronger objection. Should he have established his object, he would only have removed one blemish from his authour's performance, by substituting in its place another equally liable to censure. For if there is allowed any conclusiveness in the principles that have been shewn to regulate the introduction of marvellous imagery into poetry, allegorical and pagan intervention lie under the same interdict from entering into its

composition, as being equally unaccredited by existing opinion, and of course equally subversive of verisimilitude. We are indeed less inclined to acquiesce in such conclusions when we find the same sweeping principle, that would reduce the deities of Camoens to allegorical immateriality, might be applied to level the consistent system of Homer's machinery to the same degraded rank. In entering my protest against such an humiliation of this divine poet's imagery, I do not mean to insist on the external evidence that leads me to imagine he had an equal belief in the existence of those beings whose worship he professed, though perhaps he had not an equal reverence for them, as Milton or any succeeding poet had for that system of theology which he transferred from his creed to his poetical delineations. I confine myself merely to the consideration of the general principles which regulate epick poetry, and which, I think, explicitly decide against the employment of allegorical machinery in such composition, as tending to destroy at once its leading and characteristick qualities, its verisimilitude, its dignity, and its interest. For we have already seen that truth is necessary to secure the importance of an epick

subject; but the ascribing an evident and important effect to the agency of an inefficient cause must violate all appearance of truth. The perfection of the epopee equally consists in the elevation of its characters, and the dignity of its descriptions: but the establishment of a continued allegory degrades both into insignificance: under such a process, all the awful majesty that surrounds Omnipotence, all the striking grandeur that attends the display of its power, evaporates into " äery nothing." We are presented but with the unsubstantial rack of the object which excited our terrour or our admiration, while our awe subsides as the ministering spirit vanishes which " rode in and directed the storm." Nor is the interest which we feel for many of the higher characters in the poem, and which forms no insignificant, although not a principal, share of our gratification in its perusal, less overthrown by such a supposition. We can sympathise but little in the watchful anxiety of Minerva for her favourites, in the maternal solicitude of Venus, or in the solitary fidelity of Abdiel, when we consider such beings as nonentities, and equally incapable of feeling and of sufferance.

It is true that allegory, as has been shewn, holds a distinguished place in the romantick poem, and adds much to the propriety and effect of its composition. But it is the peculiar nature of this species of poetry, that justifies its introduction. The romance requires no strict foundation in truth, and therefore allegory does not violate its principles: its economy is chiefly episodical, and consequently there are many component parts of its structure where allegory may be admitted without interfering with its general and important action: and its chief object being to excite the emotions of surprise and admiration, it finds in allegory a powerful assistant in producing this effect, from the novelty and variety which is thus added to its incidents, and the intrigue and interchange thus created in its plot. From the difference thus displayed between the appropriate characters of the romantick and poetical epos arises the different propriety that attends allegorical intervention in either: from the nature of the former it becomes an essential appendage to its composition, while it is rejected, unless introduced in a very subordinate rank, by the principles of the latter.

In the proofs of that assertion which con-

stitutes the second point of his defence the critick appears equally unsuccessful. It is his object here to shew, that the introduction of Pagan imagery into modern action has been in general use: he particularly specifies Milton as following this practice, and alludes to some passages in the "Paradise Lost," as confirming his assertion; and he from thence maintains that Camoens had an equal liberty of appropriating this species of agency. But the use to which Milton and Camoens applied the Pagan imagery is essentially different. Milton, not only has his proper machinery conducted by intelligences of a totally different order, but never introduces these deities, as agents, in his poem:[P] he merely refers to the account given of them by some antecedent poet, and cites them only in a comparison or an illustration. Thus he likens Eve to

> a Wood-Nymph light,
> Oread or Dryad, or of Delia's train.

[P] 'Tis true that he sums up

> The Ionian gods, of Javan's issue held
> Gods;

in the number of the fallen angels. But his conduct, as will be shewn, was perfectly consistent with universal belief. See p. 238.

And to

Pales, or —— Pomona, when she fled,
Vertumnus, or to Ceres in her prime,
Yet virgin of Proserpina from Jove.

P. L.

And the garden of Eden, he compares with

..... That fair field
Of Enna, where Proserpine gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flow'r, by gloomy Dis
Was gather'd, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her thro' the world.

IV. v. 268.

In these passages there is evidently no attempt to introduce these mythological beings as agents: they contain allusions merely to well-known fables. In fact it is Milton's constant custom to qualify the reference to such beings, by distinctly specifying their feigned origin: thus

Satan——
Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge
As whom *the fables name* of monstrous size
Titanian, or Earth-born, that warr'd on Jove,
Briareos, or Typhon.

I. v. 196.

..... but Eve
Undeck'd save with herself, more lovely fair
Than Wood-nymph, or the fairest goddess *feyn'd*
Of three that in mount Ida naked strove.

V. v. 379.

However some tradition they dispers'd
Among the heathen of their purchase got,

And *fabled* how the Serpent, whom they call'd
Ophion with Eurynome, the wide
Encroaching Eve, perhaps, had first the rule
Of high Olympus, thence by Saturn driv'n,
And Ops, ere yet Dictæan Jove was born.

X. v. 578.

..... nor important less
Seem'd their petition, than when th' ancient pair
In fables old, less ancient yet than these,
Deucalion and chaste Pyrrha, to restore
The race of mankind drown'd, before the shrine
Of Themis stood devout.

XI. v. 9.

Camoens, on the other hand, brings in these divinities as actually existing: he introduces them in person performing their several offices and functions, and forwarding by their agency the whole action of the poem. Of course the conduct of the two poets possesses not the slightest similarity. Milton has beautified his work by an appropriate embellishment, while Camoens has deformed his poem by an unsuitable appendage.

In proceeding to the third division of the apologist's defence, (the attempt to prove which, by the way, invalidates his former arguments) we have to regret that the conduct of his authour did not afford him some countenance in what he wishes to establish. For this point, if proved, would be the only

part of his whole defence which would justify his conclusions, or palliate the irregularities of his authour. If in fact he could have established that the existence of the supernatural beings, introduced in " The Lusiad," was admitted by the popular superstition of the times of Camoens, the poet's practice would be not merely exempt from censure, but would be pronounced artist-like and judicious in following the true principles of fanciful imagery. But it has not been established that his machinery had any foundation in the credulity of his age. Indeed the apologist does not insist on more than one or two instances, as when he declares that, " in the age of Camoens," " Bacchus was esteemed a real dæmon." He has not however given any proof of this assertion. But should we even admit these characters to have been the objects of popular belief, what becomes of the numerous train of pagan divinities that still remain unaccounted for; the gods, both celestial and infernal, and the myriads of marine deities, specified and particularized by the poet? Were we to allow that the agency of the " Lusiad" was founded on the belief of Camoens' age, we must also believe that the

superstitions of his times were exactly conformable to those of the times of Homer, for the entire system of mythology in the works of both poets bears the strictest analogy. The machinery of Camoens not only embraces the chief part of both the superiour and the subordinate deities of "The Iliad," but accurately represents them with the same natures and characters, the same attributes and economies as described by the Grecian poet.

On the whole therefore, when we sum up the several parts of Mr. Mickle's apology, we are necessitated to pronounce the conduct of his authour equally exposed to censure, as when he undertook its justification. His arguments, instead of extenuating the poet's errours, have rather the unintentional effect of adding to his condemnation: since that cause must be pronounced totally hopeless which has failed in the hands of so able an advocate.

From the considerations already bestowed on the intervention of allegorical personages in the epopee, we are necessitated to pass a like censure on the machinery employed by M. de Voltaire in his "Henriade:" in the conduct of which an improbability is realized

as apparently subversive of all poetical verisimilitude as that which Tasso, in the passage formerly quoted, seems to glance at in the "Italia Liberata" of Trissino, and that which has been condemned in "The Lusiad." The chief personage that directs the supernatural agency of this poem is Discord. This ideal and unsubstantial being, who seems to act towards the hero of this poem with the same sentiments, that Juno held towards Æneas, or Bacchus to the Lusiads, is described as being actively engaged in opposing the success of Henry. She consoles and animates his adversaries when depressed, and solicits and brings succours to their assistance: she raises insurrections among the inhabitants of Paris, procures the assassination of Henry III, and with the aid of Love contrives to separate Henry for some time from his army. In these attempts, which form the chief incidents of the superiour agency, she is assisted by many personages of the same description as herself. War, Policy, and Fanaticism are strenuous advocates in her behalf; and Love and Truth perform also a most active and conspicuous part among the characters of the poem.

I cannot think that the French criticks, at least those of a superiour rank, and many such there are among the writers of that nation, would be found to pass a sentence different to what is here pronounced on the system of machinery, if they were brought to deliver any opinion on the present question. This I think is pretty evident with respect to the ingenious and sensible M. Marmontel, who stands foremost in the list of their best criticks. It is a remarkable circumstance in the preface which he prefixed to the "Henriade," that all consideration of the machinery is there completely overlooked. It is then scarcely necessary to observe that this could not have happened in a paper drawn up for the express purpose of recommending the beauties of that poem, had the authour found any thing in this part of the work to justify his approbation.[q]

[q] True it is, that another panegyrist of the same work does not express the same cautious silence on this subject. All however that he has advanced on the question of allegorical personages, does not call a single perfection of such machinery into view, which could qualify it to stand as an exception to what I now labour to establish. In the cause which he espouses, and which is rather gratuitously made out by a few false assumptions, the authour is merely led to assign it this less than negative merit: "Le merveilleux que l'auteur a employé *ne peut choquer* aucun

I do not even think it would be difficult to prove that the Abbé Du Bos would have ranged himself on the side of the question which is here espoused: and even without making many great allowances for what we may suppose would have been his sentiments if his work had been written subsequently to that of the "Henriade." On the impropriety of founding an epick poem on a recent story he expresses himself most unequivocally.[s] With equal decisiveness does he declare it to be his opinion, that in ceremonies and exhibitions, the Christian religion is equally fertile in fine imagery, as the Antient Mythology. Nor ought I to omit that he has given his direct negative to blending real and allegorical personages in the same composition.[t] Even when he ceases to have

lecteur sensé. On the subject of the allegories in particular he thus delivers himself; "Toutes les allégories qu'on trouve dans ce poëme, sont *nouvelles*; il y a la politique que habite au Vatican, le temple de l'amour, la vraye religion, les vertus, la discorde, les vices, tout est animé par le pinceau de M. de Voltaire."[r] Without admitting with a smile the single quality ascribed to these inventions, that of being, as they are indeed, perfectly novel, it may be remarked on the whole of this defence, that such merit deserves just such a panegyrist.

[r] Avant-propos pour la Henriade.

[s] Reflex. Critiq. § 23. [t] Ib. § 25.

in view the tacit justification of some of his own countrymen in their use of heathen machinery, he delivers himself in language which may be adduced as confirming the principles while it avoids the conclusions of Tasso on this subject. " Que les choses que vous inventez pour rendre votre sujet plus capable de plaire, soient compatibles avec ce que est de vrai dans ce sujet. Le poëte ne doit pas exiger du spectateur une foi aveugle, et qui se soumette à tout. Voilà comme parle Horace:"—Ficta voluptatis causâ, &c.

In this silence of both Italian and French criticks on the subject of allegorical agents in poetry, I do not forget that the question has been determined by a critick of our own nation, and established by a mode of proof which seems just as unanswerable as that adduced from Tasso on the subject of pagan machinery, to which we may yield our full concurrence, while we differ from the authour in the justice of its application.

" After the operation of immaterial agents," says Dr. Johnson, " which cannot

" Reflex. Critiq. § 24.

be explained, may be considered those of allegorical persons which have no real existence. To exalt causes into agents, to invest abstract ideas with form, and animate them with activity, has always been the right of poetry. But such airy beings are for the most part suffered only to do their natural office and retire. Thus Fame tells a tale, and Victory hovers over a general, or perches on a standard; but Fame and Victory can do no more. To give them any real employment, or to ascribe to them any material agency, is to make them allegorical no longer, but to shock the mind by ascribing effects to non-entity. In the *Prometheus* of Æschylus, we see Violence and Strength, and in the *Alcestis* of Euripides, we see Death, brought upon the stage, all as active persons of the drama; but no precedent can justify absurdity."[u]

[u] The same writer has given his opinion of the impropriety of both these systems of machinery now censured. "Dr. Warton, who excelled in critical perspicuity, has remarked, that the preternatural agents (in the Rape of the Lock) are very happily adapted to the purposes of the poem. *The heathen deities* can no longer gain attention: we should have turned away from a contest between Venus and Diana. The em-

But if Milton is thus culpable, how is M. de Voltaire to be defended, whose machinery stands generally exposed to the same charge of being absurd and inconsistent? Could we even overlook this great impropriety manifested in the preternatural imagery employed in the "Henriade;" as a system of epical machinery the allegories of that poem seem not to possess a single perfection, or to have a solitary recommendation. Its improbabilities not only take from the importance of the subject, from being at constant variance with the truth of the narrative; but in conducting it the author appears wholly to have forgotten the express object of all preternatural intervention in the higher poetry; since that dignity which the action of the poem might have acquired from being committed to the guidance of higher ministering spirits has been completely neglected. And from this circumstance alone, independent of what

ployment of *allegorical persons* always excites conviction of its own absurdity; they may produce effects, but cannot conduct actions: when the phantom is put in motion it dissolves: thus Discord may raise a mutiny; but Discord cannot conduct a march, nor besiege a town."

JOHNSON's Works. Vol. XI. p. 179.

may be collected from observing the particular style of objection by which he censured not only the supernatural agents in "Paradise Lost," but those of all poetical compositions, we may almost venture to affirm, (how hazardous soever the assertion may be considered) that he was really ignorant of the nature and object of epical machinery, no inconsiderable part of the art which he professed. And this by the way is a supposition that affords some solution of the circumstance of his having originally declared himself hostile to its being employed in epick poetry, a supposition which is seconded by what he has more than once confessed, that his nation had little relish for such productions.

The opinion, formerly adduced from Tasso, on the impropriety of introducing pagan machinery into the epopee, may appear to be weakened in its conclusiveness by the apparent contradiction given to it by his conduct in denominating one of the superiour agents in his poem after the pagan mythology. I allude to his introducing Pluto as the chief enemy of the Crusaders, who causes all their difficulties, and retards

their success. This seeming mixture of Pagan and Christian imagery has been severely censured by the French criticks, who have ranked it among the chief of those reputed blemishes, by which they would obscure the merit of this admirable poet: and from them it has been echoed by some of their followers on this side of the channel, who have too implicitly assented to the condemnation without having examined into its justice. As the poet's opinion has been employed in confirmation of the principles laid down on the subject before us, it will be necessary to inquire how far it is supported by his practice. And a brief insight into the nature of the superstitious belief which was prevalent in the ages from which he drew, and to which he addressed his subject, will, I think, sufficiently free him from the imputation of having acted in opposition to his own principles, and bring his conduct within the verge of that rule, which I have ventured to propose for the general introduction of supernatural imagery.

Among the opinions which were most generally admitted by the credulity of the middle ages, was the belief of the fallen angels being the source of every temptation, that seduced mankind from their allegiance to

the Deity. They were supposed to be the propagators of every species of infidelity, whether by setting themselves up as the objects of worship, or through their insinuations and rewards bringing mankind within their power, and subjecting them to their authority. Conformably to this opinion we may observe, that in every account which gives us an insight into the popular opinions on this subject, all those deities who had at any time been made the objects of idolatry, were ranked among the number of those infernal spirits. The idols of the Jews, and all other nations, who fell from their allegiance to the Deity, were represented as no other beings than those fallen angels, who under various forms had deceived and seduced them from the true worship. And among other false gods, the deities of Pagan mythology were assigned a conspicuous place. Of the belief thus generally extended, Milton has taken advantage in his "Paradise Lost," where, having summed up the greater number of the Hebrew and Gentile idols among the inhabitants of Pandemonium, he adds

> The Ionian gods, of Javan's issue, held
> Gods, yet confess'd later than heaven and earth,
> Their boasted parents.
>
> P. L. I. v. 508.

While it was thus generally believed [v] that all these false deities were the evil spirits, we cannot be surprised that there should have arisen much confusion in assigning to the latter the respective denominations of the former. This we may observe to be particularly the case with respect to the various titles given to the principal of these spirits, to whom almost all the chief names of heathen idolatry have been severally assigned. But though these various appellations were all attributed to the prince of darkness and his rebellious followers, they were chiefly denominated after those beings to whom Pagan credulity assigned occupations similar to those attributed to the infernal powers by superstition. This custom, which originated in religious notions inculcated by the sacred writers, and became thence propagated through the western and eastern world, [w]

[v] See Parad. Reg. B. ii. v. 190. and Parad. Lost. B. i. v. 391-478. Nor are examples wanting of the prevalence of the same opinions among the Italian poets: thus Bojardo,

Siccome alla fucina in Mongebello
Fabrica tuoni il *Demonio Vulcano.*
Orland. Innam. Cant. xvi. st. 21.

[w] This assertion is grounded on the express declaration of the law, the prophets, and the gospel. With respect to the orien-

seems to have obtained, down to a late period, on account of the following circumstance: it was the prevailing opinion, that these evil spirits continued to preserve an intercourse with such mortals as were versed

tal deities being considered devils, we have the testimony of Moses and the Psalmist; "But Jeshurun forsook God, which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They sacrificed *unto devils,* not to God; *to gods* whom they knew not, *to new gods that came newly up.*" Deut. ch. xxxii. v. 15. 17.—"Insomuch that they worshipped *their idols,* which turned to their own decay; yea they offered their sons and their daughters *unto devils.* And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and their daughters: whom they offered *unto the idols of Canaan,*" Ps. cvi. v. 36, 37.

The same is asserted by St. Paul of the Gentile divinities; "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice *to devils,* and not to God," 1 Cor. ch. x. v. 20. Having been hence adopted by the Christian fathers, as may be seen in all the writers on magick, it is nothing surprising that it became a prevailing opinion throughout Christendom.

But it seems to have been no less generally adopted throughout the east, and on authority as highly esteemed by the natives, as that to which it owes it propagation in Europe. This may be at least maintained on the authority of that marvellous ritual, which gave a direction to the popular opinion in matters of superstition. "What," cried the mother of Aladdin, "was your lamp then the occasion of that cursed genie's addressing himself rather to me than to you?—I would rather you would sell it, than run the hazard of being again frightened to death by touching it; and if you would take my advice you would part also with the ring, *and not have any thing to do with genies, who, as our prophet has told us, are only devils.*" Arab. Night. Entert. Vol. II. stor. of Aladd.

in the practice of magick and sorcery.[x] Over these arts they were particularly supposed to preside: and many of the proficients in the occult sciences were supposed to have bound themselves by a compact to these evil powers to yield themselves up to them after death, on condition of being instructed in their supernatural knowledge, and being rendered a temporary obedience.

It would be foreign from the present design to examine minutely into the origin of the superstitions which gave rise to this general belief. It is sufficient to observe, that these opinions of magical power were much, if not chiefly, tinctured by the antient Pagan notions of enchantment, and by superstitions which from the earliest periods were prevalent in the east. The former seem to have descended from the Romans progressively, and to have been naturally blended with the Italian notions on this subject. The latter appear to have been imported from the east as well by the settlement of the Moors in the southern

[x] Thus Del Rio expresses himself on this subject, quoting one of the Christian fathers. "Sic interpretor D. Clementis verba de angelis peccatoribus;" "Docuerunt" ait "homines quod dæmones artibus quibusdam obedire mortalibus id est magicis invocationibus possent." Disquis. Magic. lib. i. cap. 3. p. 4.

parts of Europe, as by the various expeditions undertaken by the Crusaders, where they also became blended with the Gothick superstitions which originally descended from the north of Europe.[y] In this manner, from

[y] To such an alarming degree had those notions spread over the southern parts of Europe, and so implicitly were they received by the natives, that it became necessary to restrain their growth by general councils. The following extract from a curious inquirer into these subjects, gives a faithful picture of the state of popular opinion, at this early period in Europe; and shews that it consisted of a strange mixture of Pagan, northern and eastern superstitions. "Certaine generall councils, by their decrees, have condemned the confessions and erroneous credulity of witches to be vain, fantasticall and fabulous. And even those, which are parcele of their league, whereupon our witch-mongers doo so build; to wit, their night-walkings and *meetings with Herodias and the Pagan gods,* at which time they should passe so farre in so little space on cock-horse; their transubstantiation, their eating of children, and their pulling of them from their mothers' sides; their entering into men's houses, through chinks and little holes, where a flie can scarce wring out, and the disquieting of the inhabitants: all which are not only said by a generall council to be meere fantasticall imaginations in dreams, but so affirmed by the antient writers. The words of the council are these; It may not be omitted, that certaine wicked women, *following Sathans provocations, being seduced by the illusions of devils,* believe and profess that in the night-time they ride abroad with *Diana, the goddesse of the Pagans, or else with Herodias, with an innumerable multitude,* upon certain beasts, and passe over manie countries and nations; in the silence of the night, and do whatever *these ladies or fairies* command." Reg. Scott. Myst. of Witchcr. B. iii. ch. 16.

considering that the Pagan and Saracenick opinions of enchantment, combined with the popular notions of the fallen angels presiding over these arts, we acquire an easy solution of the difficulty before us; and learn the cause of the names ascribed to the chief of these dæmons. Thus the Pagan title of Hecate or Proserpine was retained to the principal spirit who presided over witchcraft and sorcery: and thus the prince of hell was in like manner denominated after the Pagan mythology. "The husband of this infernall goddesse," says a popular writer of the 16th century, "was PLUTO, or Dis, so called of the name of Riches: as wee know that amongst the Hebrews likewise, the divell for the same reason is called Mammona. Hee was called also αδης, not that he is αιδης, that is to say, in darknes and invisible; but because he was *the cause, and authour of the death, destruction and desolation of mankind by his temptation.* And for this cause he is termed αδης of the Hebrew word Ed; and is *the very Ophoneus, or Serpent, the sworne enemie of God.* The Ægyptians did by another name call *this prince of divels* Serapis,[z] &c.—

[z] P. Le Loier Treat. of Strang. Sights and Appar. p. 15.

The eastern denomination of this infernal chief was the same, and thus the title became more generally adopted. " Supra mortales omnes Magicis dediti fuere Persæ—duos credidere deos auctores rerum et dominos; alterum bonum Oromagam vel Oromagdam, quem solem censebant, et malum alterum, Arimanum *sive* PLUTONEM: deinde *ab his duplicem magicam deduxerunt*; *unam quæ superstitiosâ tota cultum falsorum deorum tradebat*; alteram quæ naturas intimas rerum callebat, quam Persis utramque Apuleius adscribit."

To these causes we may consequently attribute the circumstance of the European writers giving the name of Pluto to the infernal spirit in preference to any other of his various appellations. And conformably to these received opinions, we find that the poets, who draw their subjects from those ages, and who had occasion to mention the chief of the evil spirits, generally adopted this title; and at the same time assigned him all those attributes, which, being given to him

[a] DEL RIO. Disquis. Magic. lib. i. cap. 3. pag. 4. Vid. supr. p. 240. n. x. which contains a remark, subjoined by the authour to the present quotation.

by the Pagans, were conformable to their own superstitions, and not inconsistent with their religious belief. Thus Dante has given him the name of Pluto.

> Venimmo al punto, dove si digrada:
> Quivi trovammo PLUTO *il gran nemico.*
> Infern. Cant. vi.

And immediately afterwards, in the following canto, he joins the names of Pluto and Satan together:

> Pape SATAN, pape SATAN alleppe,
> Cominciò PLUTO, con la voce chioccia:
> Ib. Cant. vii.

Under the same name he is mentioned by Forteguerri:

> ecco d'improviso che si rompe
> La terra, ed esce fuora un fumo nero
> Misto a gran fiamma, che l'aere corrompe.
> Indi PLUTON, che men dell' uso è altero
> Senza l'usate sue deformi pompe.
> Quasi lieto s'accosta al Cavaliero
> E gli dice: Signor, grazie infinite
> Ti dà dell' opra il Regnator di Dite.
> Ricciardet. Cant. xi. st. 19.

Chaucer has in like manner thus designated the chief dæmon. He calls him

> PLUTO, that is the King of Faerie.
> And many a ladie in his company
> Folwing his wif, the Quene PROSERPINA.
> Merch. Tale. 10101.

Spenser also has adopted the Gothick notions, thus mixed with the Pagan and Saracenick ideas, when he mentions the sovereign of the infernal regions.

> By that same way the direfull dames doe drive
> Their mournfull charett, fild with rusty blood,
> And down to PLUTOE's house are come alive.
>
> F. Q. I. v. 32.

> At length they came into a larger space,
> That stretcht itself into an ample playne;
> Through which a beaten broad high way did trace,
> That straight did lead to PLUTOE's griesly rayne.
>
> F. Q. II. vi. 21.

And he particularly alludes to Pluto and Proserpine, when he enters into the description of Archemago's magical rites:

> Then choosing out few words most horrible,
> (Let none them read) thereof did verses frame,
> With which, and other spells like terrible,
> He bad awake black PLUTO's *griesly dame.*
>
> F. Q. I. i. 37.

Milton also has assigned the infernal regions an epithet from this Pagan denomination:

> and from the door
> Of that PLUTONIAN hall, invisible
> Ascended his high throne.
>
> P. L. x. 443.

When we examine the conduct of Tasso, which has incurred so much censure, we shall

find that he has only accommodated himself to these opinions of his times, and thus constructed his machinery according to the principles of that branch of the epick subject. The character and conduct of Pluto, by which title he designates the prince of the fallen angels, corresponds most accurately with the notions formed of the enemy of man. He introduces him as

> *Il gran nemico* de l'umane genti.
>
> Ger. Cant. iv. st. 1.

And makes him mention, in his speech to the infernal powers, his rebellion against the Deity, and his subsequent fall from heaven.

> Tartarei numi, di seder più degni
> Là sovra il sole ond' è 'l origin vostra,
> Che meco già da i più felici regni
> Spinse il gran caso in questa orribil chiostra:
> Gli antichi altrui sospetti e i fieri sdegni
> Noti son troppo, e l'alta impresa nostra.
> Or colui regge a suo voler le stelle,
> E noi siam giudicate alme rubelle.
>
> Ib. Cant. iv. st. 9.

And again,

> Ah non sia ver; che non sono anco estinti
> Gli spirti in noi di quel valor primiero,
> Quando di ferro, e d'alte fiamme cinti
> Pugnammo già contra il celeste Impero:

Fummo (io no'l nego) in quel conflitto vinti:
Pur non mancò virtute al gran pensiero:
Ebbero i più felici allor vittoria,
Rimase a noi d'invitto ardir la gloria.
Ib. Cant. iv. st. 15.

It requires no farther illustration to evince the identity of the personage thus described with the common enemy of man. The striking similarity that exists between the character of Pluto, as he is depicted in this canto, and that of Milton's Satan, will at once shew that the infernal leader mentioned by both poets was in every respect the same; though differently designated, in conformity to the different belief of the human agents in their respective poems. Nor can it, I think, admit of any doubt, that the Italian poet possessed a licence of assigning, from among the number of titles given this being, whatever denomination was most suitable to his purposes: and not only that he had a liberty of choice, but that he adopted the best line of conduct in selecting that name which was his most common and most received appellation. We might go still farther, and, following the opinion of a late eminent critick, insist on the propriety of a poet's adopting whatever classical imagery lies within his

power; which, when not inconsistent with existing opinions, will ever excite and retain a lasting admiration. But it is sufficient for our purpose to have remarked the conformity of Tasso's machinery to the popular opinions of his characters, as well as to the received belief of his readers: a practice which, having been pursued by his great predecessors, Homer and Virgil, and not being rejected by our no less eminent countryman, may be set down as the most comprehensive principle of machinery, that gives verisimilitude to its intervention and propriety to its imagery.

We should here, however, return back a little, to draw a line of distinction between the conduct of Tasso, now attempted to be justified, and that of Trissino and Camoens, which has been lately condemned. For it may be objected, that if the Pagan divinities had been assigned a place among the gothick superstitions, under the idea of their being fallen angels, the latter poets should have been allowed the privilege of introducing them into their compositions. To this it may be answered, that if they had merely adhered to the opinions thus inculcated, they certainly might have claimed such a liberty:

and had they carried it to no greater extent than Tasso has done, they would not have been censured. But their conduct has widely differed from his: they have adopted the heathen mythology in its most perfect form, with the qualities and characters which it possessed in the times of pure Paganism; while Tasso introduced such of their superstitions only as were consistent with the gothick fictions, and those modified by subsequent doctrines, and blended with posteriour opinions.[b] Of course the whole weight of the censure which he has pronounced on the injudicious conduct of these poets falls upon them with its full force, while he himself has kept clear of the stroke.

If we were to prosecute our research somewhat farther into the opinions which

[b] We must here add a further observation, that the Pagan divinities, as introduced by Tasso, and those writers, whose authority we have quoted in his defence, were such only as could be represented to support the character and conduct the actions attributed to the fallen angels. This can never be supposed to be the case with respect to the Jupiter of Camoens, who being delineated by the poet with all the power and beneficence attached to Providence by his religious belief, can never be reduced to the rank of those subordinate and malignant spirits under which description alone the Pagan deities were believed, or can be allowed, to be classed.

have been just unfolded, we should perhaps be able to account for another part of the same poet's conduct, which has met with treatment equally harsh as that from which he has been now defended. The prevalence of the belief that the infernal spirits were active in their enmity towards man, but particularly towards the Christians; and also of the opinion that the chief means by which they accomplished their designs was by their presiding over magick, and employing enchanters to execute their hostile intentions, will reconcile to propriety the great portion of this species of imagery that runs through the body of his poem. Having selected as the agents of his superiour intervention those beings whose existence was alone consistent with the belief of his characters, and of his readers, he could assign to them that species of imagery only, which was conformable to the same belief. Thus it became incumbent on him to regulate the action of his fable by means of magical intervention, which the superstition of his age believed to be the chief, if not only bond of connection between human operation and supernatural interference. And

thus that great portion of imagery which has been censured as foreign to his subject appears most essentially connected with it: it is found to be, not an extraneous and merely ornamental appendage to the poem, but the main spring and necessary power which forwards or retards its action.

In this light we may observe that the poet has represented the two great supernatural events which operate to the disadvantage of the Christians, as being instigated by the infernal chief, and conducted under his auspices. It is he who inspires the enchanter Hidroates with those counsels which seduced the Christian leader by the snares of Armida.[c] And the magician Ismen, acting immediately under his influence, creates the enchantment of the forest, which forms the other leading point in the machinery of the poem, by the assistance and ministry of the infernal spirits. The less important incidents also, that counteract the success of the Christians, proceed from the same source: and thus this portion of the superiour agency becomes connected into one continued sys-

[d] Cant. iv. st. 22.

tem of hostility, conducted by the same inimical spirits, and directed by the same infernal inspiration.

But if it be asserted, that the poet has any where carried the imagery of his fictions beyond the bounds of necessity; if his descriptions have at times luxuriated into romantick exuberance beyond what the mere agency of his superiour interference required, the following apology may be offered for his conduct.

We have seen, in the course of this inquiry, that the several species of composition into which the divisions of poetry have branched out, are each distinguished by a separate and appropriate character. The drama, the romance, and the epopee, severally address themselves to our imagination through a channel peculiar to themselves. But though the immediate effects that each tends to awaken are respectively distinct, they are not incompatible with each other; and as their general object is to excite the common end of pleasure, a judicious adoption of each, but in a subordinate rank to the particular character of the composition into which they are introduced, will be found

to give variety to its imagery, and interest to its action. Thus the epical character of dignity is often, and with great success, admitted into dramatick and romantick productions: pity and terrour are found to increase the interest of the epick romance; and surprise and admiration to heighten the effect of the drama. But in the poetical epos such an union is chiefly to be sought after. As the most finished work of human invention, it should embrace every possible mode of contributing to our gratification, whether by pursuing those means of delight more appropriate to itself, or by adopting those which are more appendant to relative species of poetry. While in its most predominent feature it aims at captivating our taste, it ought not to neglect those striking effects which will at times call our more perturbed emotions into action, or omit those engaging touches that occasionally awaken our sympathies. With this restriction however, that all such adscititious attributes be kept subordinate to its proper character: that its dignified nature be never interrupted, but merely diversified by their introduction; and that it preserve unimpaired its appro-

priate elevation, though at times softened by the pathetick, or inspirited by the surprising.

The practice of the best epick writers, which gives the highest authority to all critical principles, affords an uniform support to this opinion. As instances of a mixture of pathos with epical composition, many descriptions might be deduced from Homer and Virgil, beside those narratives, so often alluded to, of the lamentations for Patroclus and Hector, or the misfortunes of Dido and Evander. In referring to the authority of the former poet, for an introduction of romantick imagery, which is now more immediately the object of research, we may adduce the magick bowl of Circe, the allurements of the Syrens, and the dangers of Scylla and Charybdis. And Virgil, in his accounts of the bleeding myrtle, of the Harpies, and of the metamorphosis of the Trojan ships into sea-nymphs, has paralleled the most romantick fictions of the Italian poet.

And here, by the way, we may offer a defence of the allegory of Sin and Death in "Paradise Lost," the introduction of which, I am venturous enough to hazard my opinion, is fully justified on the principles now

displayed. This episode, which is purely of the romantick kind, both by its nature as an allegory, and by the process of its conduct, seems to me perfectly reconcileable to the principles of epick poetry, as embracing at times a mixture of that imagery which excites surprise and admiration. In thus expressing my sentiments in favour of its authour, I do not forget the high judgment from which has proceeded so opposite a decision.[a] Yet, though I feel cautious in differing from such high authority, I must confess I think my dissent sufficiently supported by the practice of those eminent masters of the art who have been shewn to have adopted a conduct similar to that of Milton. And further I must express my opinion, that the critick's censure, though perfectly just in its fundamental principles, appears to fail in its application to this episode. We must consider Satan's adventure with Sin and Death as but an appendage to the action of the poem, and no part of the means by which its progress is advanced. Of course the poet cannot be said to have "ascribed effects to nonentity," such effects at least as the critick's

[a] See page 234.

reasoning is intended to proscribe, when these unsubstantial beings produce none which are of consequence to his fable. They are merely the agents of an episode, and of an episode which is peculiarly calculated to produce the effects appropriate to marvellous poetry. As such the whole allegory appears to me not only consistent with the principles of the epopee, but to form one of the brightest ornaments of that truly splendid poem.

From the establishment of the points examined above on the insufficiency of Pagan divinities, and allegorical machinery to form the higher agency of poetry, it follows that the epick muse receives a further limitation in Poetical Licence. On comparing what was formerly advanced on the necessity of employing machinery in such compositions, with what is now declared on the unsuitableness of heathen mythology, and allegorical personages for such a purpose, it appears, that there can be no subject suited to epick poetry within the whole compass of profane history. And this is a matter of no small regret, since it abounds to an unexampled degree in those great characters and splendid exploits which are so much adapted to the

heroick poem; and since it is so fortunately situated with respect to time, being placed in a situation that possesses the finest effects of light and shade, neither lost in the obscurity of a remote æra, nor protruded into the luminousness of recent period. But with all these advantages it becomes as unsuitable a model for the artist's imitation as the face which is deprived of a feature, or the form which is mutilated of a limb. Nor can we, as in the comparison, by any means infer that the defects of accident or nature may be supplied by the poet, as well as by the painter. To remedy this defect, and give to a mythological subject machinery suitable to our religious or superstitious notions, must be improper: since between the agents of the poem, and so great a portion of the imagery, there could be found no point of contact to combine their action, so that the movements of the one should be regulated by the impulse of the other. This seems to have been observed by the ingenious authour of "Leonidas," who, finding that the machinery naturally attached to his subject was unsuitable to the nature of his work, judiciously resolved on its total suppression.

II. The second point concerning epical machinery which has been proposed for discussion, affords the following question to be solved; at what periods of the epical action is the poet justified in calling in the aid of celestial interference? This point may be at once determined on considering the nature and object of poetical machinery as it was formerly explained. For as its express object is to impart the greatest possible dignity to the action which is narrated; in order to diffuse this quality through the extent of the subject, every incident which gives a new turn to the action, which tends either to hasten or retard its advancement, should be undertaken at the instigation of some superiour intelligence, if not conducted by its interposition and assistance.

The justness of this principle is completely established by the uniform practice of Homer; and this uniformity of practice fully justifies the supposition of this inimitable artist's having regarded the machinery of the epopee in the light in which it is now placed. And Plutarch has consequently remarked of him that he perfects nothing without the efficience of his divinities. The great bond of connection which gives an unity and con-

sistency of action to the machinery in the Iliad is the Will of Jupiter. Every material event which is effected by supernatural agency is either accomplished by his immediate direction, or completed by his permission. Influenced by the desire of honouring the hero of the poem, all his exertions tend to this object; when he interests himself in favour of either of the contending parties, it is with the view to revenge his quarrel with the Greeks, or to satiate his rage against the Trojans.

In this light we behold him, in the opening of the poem, assenting to the supplication of Thetis on behalf of her son; ratifying his promise with an oath; and immediately engaging actively in his favour. In order to bring the adverse parties into action, that the Greeks might suffer by the absence of their principal champion, he dispatches a dream to Agamemnon, which, inspiring the Grecian chief with false hopes of success, invites him to arm his troops, and to lead them to battle. For the same purpose he dismisses Iris to the council of the Trojans, who advises the chiefs of this party to assemble and number their forces. With the same object still in view, he sends Minerva to per-

suade the Trojans to break the truce which had been agreed upon by the contending armies. By his command the goddess descends to earth, and appearing to Pandarus, in the shape of one of Antenor's sons, prevails on him to discharge an arrow at Menelaus, by which the truce is broken and hostilities again commenced. He now begins to exert himself more actively in the cause of Achilles; prohibits the other gods from assisting either of the hostile armies; and, descending from heaven, gives signals of victory to the Trojans. The chiefs of this party he immediately assists, and excites them against their adversaries: he animates them by his advice, strengthens them by his inspiration, and encourages them by propitious omens. On the other hand he intimidates the leaders of the Grecian host, and raising a wind embarrasses them by involving them in clouds of dust; he depresses their courage and throws them into confusion. And having thus conducted the Trojans to nearly complete success, he retires from the field of battle.

At this time, it may be observed, Neptune, taking advantage of his absence, assists and encourages the Greeks. Profiting

still more by the deception practised on Jupiter by Juno, he addresses the Greeks, leads them on to battle in person, and turns the scale of victory in their favour. Jupiter, however, awakening in the mean while, perceives the deceit, and commands Neptune to retire from the scene of action. Again, exerting himself on the side of the Trojans, he reduces the affairs of the Greeks to the last extremity, until the anger of Achilles is completely satiated; the whole, nearly, of their leaders are wounded, their forces dismayed, and the enemy, already within their entrenchments, carrying destruction to their navy.

So far the will of Jupiter, in pursuance of the promise made to Thetis, directs every important action which tends to embarrass the Greeks, or insures victory to the Trojans. But the anger of Achilles having, by the death of Patroclus, directed itself towards a different object, Jupiter, still willing to honour the hero, seems likewise to change his sentiments, and employs his favouring influence in coincidence with the wishes of Achilles. He now permits the deities, who espouse the interest of the Greeks, to descend to their succour: and by their mini-

stration every material incident is conducted, which takes place, in the course of the action. By the command of Juno, Iris advises Achilles to show himself unarmed to the Trojans, that the Greeks might obtain some respite and refreshment. Minerva covers him with her ægis, increases the terrour of his voice, and heightens the splendour of his appearance. To prevent the Trojans from recovering from their panick, until Vulcan had completed the armour of Achilles, which he had undertaken to forge at the instigation of Thetis, Juno hastens the setting of the sun. And when they are thrown into confusion by Achilles, she impedes their flight by involving them in darkness. She dispatches Vulcan to dry up the waters of the river Xanthus, by which the hero was nearly overpowered in his pursuit of the Trojans. In his combat with Hector he is equally assisted by Minerva. She advises him to take a temporary rest, while she persuades Hector to engage him: she succeeds in deceiving this hero, by assuming the shape of Deiphobus, and giving him false hopes of assistance, leads him to destruction. The last great incident which engages the attention of the gods is the redemption of the body of Hec-

tor: seeing his remains exposed to the unappeased rage of his enemy, they commiserate his situation, and project his deliverance. Jupiter dismisses Thetis to Achilles, to prevail upon him to resign the body; he at the same time directs Iris to appear to Priam, and to instruct him how to recover the body of his son. Mercury, by his command, conducts Priam unobserved through the Grecian camp, escorts him to the tent of Achilles, and leads him into the presence of the hero. Achilles' anger being now extinguished, through the interposition of Jupiter, Priam obtains his suit, and is conducted home, with Hector's body, without interruption or molestation.

After this manner, the whole action of the poem is conducted by preternatural agency; but it is not the leading incidents, merely, which engage the celestial care; we find the aid of the gods employed in those of a subordinate description. Whenever the poet is enabled to impart dignity to any occurrence, or elevation to any character, he uniformly calls in the aid of celestial intervention. He introduces Apollo to raise a plague among the Greeks; represents Iris as conducting Helen to view the contending armies; de-

scribes Thetis as preserving the body of Petroclus from corruption; and Boreas and Zephyrus as exciting a wind to consume his funeral pile. To exalt the leading characters of his work, the tutelary deities of each are always at hand. Minerva never deserts Ulysses or Diomede: she encourages and advises them; endows them with strength and fortitude. Whether in the battle or the council, she guides their motions and directs their judgments; and even when contending in the games she insures them success in the less elevated objects of their ambition. Venus is equally active in assisting Paris, and Apollo in encouraging Hector; Jupiter himself takes an active part in the minor incidents, and pours down drops of blood in honour of his son Sarpedon.

Thus, it appears, the movements of the whole system of Homer's machines are informed and conducted by celestial intervention; and thus his work acquired a general elevation from having all its incidents, whether of greater or lesser importance, committed to the guidance of superiour intelligences. But the sublime nature of the imagery, by which he has contrived to bring those beings into action, imparts to his descriptions a degree

of magnificence to which his own language only is competent to do any justice. Of this, we cannot offer a more appropriate example than that in which Jupiter ratifies his promise to Thetis.

[x] Ἠ, και κυανεσσιν επ' οφρυσι νευσε Κρονιων·
Αμβροσιαι δ' αρα χαιται επερρωσαντο ανακτος,
Κρατος απ' αθανατοιο, μεγαν δ'ελελιξεν Ολυμπον.
Il. I. v. 528-530.

The idea which he gives of his power is replete with the most sublime images, and expressed in the most energetick language.

[y] Κεκλυτε μευ παντες τε θεοι πασαι τε θεαιναι,
Οφρ' ειπω τα με θυμος ενι στηθεσσι κελευει.
Μητε τις ην θηλεια θεος τογε, μητε τις αρσην
Πειρατω διακερσαι εμον επος· αλλ' αμα παντες
Αινειτ', οφρα ταχιστα τελευτησω ταδε εργα.
Ὁν δ' αν εγων απανευθε θεων εθελοντα νοησω
Ελθοντ', η Τρωεσσιν αρηγεμεν η Δαναοισι,
Πληγεις ου κατα κοσμον ελευσεται Ουλυμπονδε.

[x] He spoke, and awful bends his sable brows;
Shakes his ambrosial curls and gives the nod;
The stamp of fate, and sanction of the God:
High heav'n with trembling the dread signal took,
And all Olympus to the centre shook. Pope. Il. i. 682-6.

[y] Celestial states, immortal Gods! give ear,
Hear our decree, and rev'rence what ye hear;

Η μιν ἑλων ῥιψω ες Ταρταρον ηερεντα,
Τηλε μαλ', ὅππι βαθιστον ὑπο χθονος εστι βερεθρον,
Ενθα σιδηρειαι τε πυλαι και χαλκεος ουδος,
Τοσσον ενερθ' αϊδεω, ὁσον ουρανος εστ' απο γαιης·
Γνωσετ' επειθ' ὁσον ειμι θεῶν καρτιστος ἁπαντων.
Ειδ' αγε, πειρησαθε θεοι, ἱνα ειδετε παντες,
Σειρην χρυσειην εξ ουρανοθεν κρεμασαντες·
Παντες δ' εξαπλεςθε θεοι πᾶσαι τε θεαιναι.
Αλλ' ουκ αν ερυσαιτ' εξ ουρανοθεν πεδιονδε
Ζῆν' υπατον μητιωρ', ουδ' ει μαλα πολλα καμοιτε·
Αλλ' ἱτε δη και εγω προφρων εθελοιμι ερυσσαι,
Αυτῃ κεν γαιῃ ερυσαιμ' αυτῃ τε θαλασσῃ·

The fix'd decree, which not all heav'n can move:
Thou, Fate, fulfil it, and ye Pow'rs, approve!
What God but enters yon forbidden field,
Who yields assistance, or but wills to yield,
Back to the skies with shame he shall be driv'n,
Gash'd with dishonest wounds, the scorn of heav'n:
Or far, oh far, from steep Olympus thrown,
Low in the dark Tartarian gulf shall groan,
With burning chains fix'd to the brazen floors,
And lock'd by hell's inexorable doors;
And deep beneath th' infernal centre hurl'd,
As from that centre to th' æthereal world.
Let him who tempts me dread those dire abodes,
And know th' Almighty is the God of gods.
League all your forces then, ye Pow'rs above,
Join all, and try the omnipotence of Jove;
Let down our golden everlasting chain,
Whose strong embrace holds heav'n, and earth, and main:
Strive all, of mortal and immortal birth,
To drag by this the thund'rer down to earth.
Ye strive in vain! If I but stretch this hand,
I heave the gods, the ocean, and the land;

Σειρην μεν κεν εῶειτα περι ῥιον Ουλυμποιο
Δησαιμην· τα δε κ' αὖτε μετηορα παντα γενοιτο.
Τοσσον εγω περι τ' ειμι θεῶν, περι τ' ειμ' ανθρωπων.
Il. viii. 5-27.

His description of Neptune's approach to the scene of action, so celebrated by Longinus, might be set in competition with this passage, as equally poetical in its conceptions and numbers, were it not too long for insertion. I trust however I shall be pardoned, for indulging myself in the pleasure of transcribing that sublime description, the battle of the gods; which is only parallelled by the battle of the Titans in Hesiod, and that of the angels in Milton;

[z] Αυταρ επει μεθ' ὁμιλον Ολυμπιοι ηλυθον ανδρῶν,
Ὦρτο δ' ερις κρατερη, λαοσσοος· αὖε δ' Αθηνη,
Στᾶσ' ὁτε μεν παρα ταφρον ερυκτην τειχεος εκτος,
Αλλοτ' επ' ακταων εριδουπων μακρα αὖτει·
Αὖε δ' Αρης ἑτερωθεν, ερεμνῇ λαιλαπι ἶσος,
Οξυ κατ' ακροτατης πολεως Τρωεσσι κελευων,

I fix the chain to great Olympus' height,
And the vast world hangs trembling in my sight!
For such I reign, unbounded and above;
And such are men and gods compar'd to Jove.
Il. viii. 7-34.

[z] But when the pow'rs descending swell'd the fight,
Then tumult rose; fierce rage and pale affright

Αλλοτε παρ Σιμοεντι θεων επι Καλλικολωνη.
Ὡς τους αμφοτερους μακαρες θεοι οτρυνοντες,
Συμβαλον, εν δ' αυτοῖς εριδα ῥηγνυντο βαρειαν.
Δεινων δ' εξρωτησε πατηρ ανδρῶν τε θεῶν τε
Ὑψοθεν· αυταρ ενερθε Ποσειδαων ετιναξε
Γαῖαν απειρεσιην, ορεων τ' αιπεινα καρηνα.
Παντες δ' εσσειοντο ποδες πολυπιδακου Ιδης,
Και κορυφαι, Τρωων τε πολις, και νῆες Αχαιῶν.
Εδδεισεν δ' ὑπενερθεν αναξ ανερων Αϊδωνευς,
Δεισας δ' εκ θρονου ἁλτο, και ιαχε· μη οἱ ὑπερθε
Γαῖαν αναρρηξειε Ποσειδαων ενοσιχθων,
Οικια δε θνητοῖσι και αθανατοισι φανειη
Σμερδαλε', ευρωεντα, τα τε στυγεουσι θεοι περ·
Τοσσος αρα κτυπος ὦρτο θεῶν εριδι ξυνιοντων.
Ἧτοι μεν γαρ εναντα Ποσειδαωνος ανακτος
Ἱστατ' Απολλων Φοῖβος, εχων ια πτερεντα·
Αντα δ' Ενυαλιοιο θεα γλαυκῶπις Αθηνη·
Ἡρη δ' αντιστη χρυσηλακατος κελαδεινη,

Varied each face; then Discord sounds alarms,
Earth echoes, and the nations rush to arms.
Now thro' the trembling shores Minerva calls,
And now she thunders from the Grecian walls;
Mars, hov'ring o'er his Troy, his terrours shrouds
In gloomy tempests and a night of clouds:
Now thro' each Trojan heart he fury pours
With voice divine from Ilion's topmost tow'rs;
Now shouts to Simoïs from her beauteous hill;
The mountains shook, the rapid streams stood still.
Above, the sire of gods his thunder rolls,
And peals on peals redoubled rend the poles;
Beneath, stern Neptune shakes the solid ground;
The forests wave, the mountains nod around;

Αρτεμις ιοχεαιρα, κασιγνητη Ἑκατοιο·
Λυτοῖ δ' αντεστος σῶκος, ερισυνιος Ερμῆς·
Αυτα δ' αρ' Ἡφαιστοιο μεγας ποταμος βαθυδινης,
Ὃν Ξανθον καλεουσι θεοι, ανδρες δε Σκαμανδρον.

Il. xx. v. 47-74.

Thro' all their summits tremble Ida's woods,
And from their sources boil her hundred floods.
Troy's turrets totter on the rocking plain,
And the toss'd navies beat the heaving main.
Deep in the dismal region of the dead
Th' infernal monarch rear'd his hoary head,
Leap'd from his throne, lest Neptune's arm should lay
His dark dominions open to the day,
And pour in light on Pluto's drear abodes,
Abhorr'd by men, and dreadful ev'n to gods.

Such war th' immortals wage, such horreurs rend
The world's vast concave when the gods contend.
First silver-shafted Phœbus took the plain
Against blue Neptune, monarch of the main;
The god of arms his giant bulk display'd,
Oppos'd to Pallas, War's triumphant maid.
Against Latona march'd the son of May;
The quiver'd Dian, sister of the day
(Her golden arrows sounding at her side,)
Saturnia, majesty of heav'n, defied.
With fiery Vulcan last in battle stands
The sacred flood that rolls on golden sands;
Xanthus his name with those of heav'nly birth,
But call'd Scamander by the sons of earth.

Il. xx. v. 63-102.

CHAP. III.

OF THE HISTORICK EPOS.

FROM what has been already declared on the nature of the historical epopee, it must be pretty evident that no licence can justify the introduction of preternatural agents into its composition. The same reasoning, which applies to exclude fiction from its incidents, extends equally to proscribe that embellishment which is attained by machinery. With a justice of exemplification more striking than any application of rule, Voltaire has remarked, " Virgile et Homère avoïent fort bien fait d'amener les Divinitiés sur la scene. Lucain a fait tout aussi bien de s'en passer.—Les guerres civiles de Rome etoient trop serieuses pour ces joux d'imagination. Quel rôle Cesar jouerait il dans la plaine de Pharsale, si Iris venait lui apporter son épée, ou si Venus descendait dans un nuage d'or a son secours." And this remark may be extended from these particular instances, to every fact in which there is room for preternatural agency. The expedient, it must be confessed,

would defeat its own purpose, which, in seeking to confer greater importance on real events, would make their truth questionable by coupling them with fictitious circumstances.

But the project of giving machinery to the historical epos is exposed to still stronger objections by being brought to the test of that rule which was formerly laid down for determining the nature, and fixing the bounds of poetical fiction. For, supposing this project realized, it must be evident that the marvellous imagery, thus appended to the poem, must be so wholly void of verisimilitude, as to procure from the reader no extenuation of its improbabilities. Since from his knowledge both of the subject and characters in the work, if he did not possess a perfect conviction, that the whole of these imaginary fictions " would have been questioned as real, by the characters in the poem," he must himself feel a disposition " to negative them as false," not less on account of his acquired knowledge, than his religious belief.

Being thus restricted in his imitations to a close delineation of nature, the historick poet seems to be bound, in conformity to

the end of his art, to supply by suitable expedients that ornament which the more exalted poetry possesses in right of Poetick Licence. This, as was before observed, was deemed a requisite by Lucan, in his "Pharsalia," where the epical quality of dignity has been carried to a height, not often excelled in Homer and Virgil.

Though the historical poet is denied the liberty of employing celestial agents, he is not interdicted from representing the general incidents of his poem, as engaging the divine care, and being forwarded by its secret interposition: by this means, as I have already remarked, he may add much to the dignity and importance of his compositions. He is besides afforded in this manner an opportunity of introducing those details of religious ceremonies, and descriptions of that grand and awful scenery which is adapted to the celebration of such rites; which, infusing a degree of solemnity into his narration, must proportionally conduce to heighten its dignity.

But more than this, if there is any thing grand and awful, or even mysterious and dreadful, in the popular superstitions of the period from which his subject is taken, the

poet should omit no opportunity of seizing and appropriating these, in order to add to its sublimity and improve its beauty. The extensive resources which thus offered themselves to heighten the dignity of the historick epopee, did not escape the observation of Lucan, who has derived through this channel some striking imagery which diversifies the general character of his narrative, and imparts to it the highest splendour.

Among the superstitions, admitted by Pagan credulity with implicit belief, may be mentioned those miraculous appearances and prodigies, which were conceived to precede any event of more than ordinary importance, and to forebode the approach of every disastrous occurrence. From this belief Lucan has transferred to his "Pharsalia" some of the most sublime descriptions; as may be instanced from his relation of the prodigies which preceded the civil war, and of those that occurred previously to the battle of Pharsalia. With equal judgment has he availed himself of the popular belief of persons revisiting the earth after their decease, introducing, from this source of the marvellous, the spirit of Julia appearing to Pompey, with the most awful effect. The mysteries of priest-

hood, and the ceremonies of divination, supplied him with materials equally suited to the purposes of poetic description: from these he has derived those truly grand descriptions of the sacred grove at Marseilles, and of the prophetic rites at Delphos, which add so much dignity to his poem. But from the belief of witchcraft and sorcery, prevalent in his age, and particularly attributed to the inhabitants of Thessaly, he was furnished with some of the most splendid imagery that ever adorned an epick subject.

The following passages, selected from his description of the Thessalian enchantresses, convey the most impressive idea of their power.

Cessavere vices rerum: delataque longa
Hæsit nocte dies: legi non paruit æther.
Torpuit et præceps audito carmine mundus;
Axibus et rapidis impulsos Jupiter urgens
Miratur non ire polos. Nunc omnia complent,
Imbribus, et calido producunt nubila Phœbo;
Et tonat ignaro cœlum Jove. Vocibus iisdem
Humentes late nebulas, nimbosque solutis
Excessere comis. Ventis cessantibus, æquor
Intumuit: rursus vetitum sentire procellas
Conticuit turbante Noto: puppimque ferentes
In ventum tumuere sinus. De rupe pependit
Abscissâ fixus torrens: amnisque cucurrit
Non quà pronus erat. Nilum non extulit æstas:

Mæander direxit aquas: Rhodanumque morantem
Præcipitavit Arar: submisso vertice montes
Explicuere jugum. Nubes suspexit Olympus:
Solibus et nullis Scythicæ, cum bruma rigeret,
Dimaduere nives: impulsam sidere Tethyn
Reppulit Hæmonidum, defenso littore, carmen.
Terra quoque immoti concussit ponderis axem,
Et medium vergens nisu titubavit in orbem.
Tantæ molis onus percussum voce recessit,
Prospectumque dedit circumlabentis Olympi.[a]

Phars: Lib: vi.

[a] Whene'er the proud inchantress gives command,
Eternal motion stops her active hand;
No more heav'n's rapid circles journey on,
But universal nature stands foredone:
The lazy god of day forgets to rise,
And everlasting night pollutes the skies.
Jove wonders to behold her shake the pole,
And, unconsenting, hears his thunders roll.
Now, with a word, she hides the sun's bright face,
Now blots the wide æthereal azure space:
Lonely anon she shakes her flowing hair,
And straight the stormy low'ring heav'ns are fair;
At once she calls the golden light again,
The clouds fly swift away, and stops the drizzly rain.
In stillest calms she bids the waves run high,
And smooths the deep, tho' Boreas shakes the sky.
When winds are hush'd her potent breath prevails,
Wafts on the bark, and fills the flagging sails.
Streams have run back at murmurs of her tongue,
And torrents from the rock suspended hung.
No more the Nile his wonted seasons knows,
And in a line the straight Mæander flows.
Arar has rush'd with headlong waters down,
And driv'n unwillingly the sluggish Rhone.

Their power over animated nature is no less extensive.

Omne potens animal leti, genitumque nocere,
Et pavet Hæmonias, et mortibus instruit arteis.
Hos avidæ tigres, et nobilis ira leonum
Ore fovent blando; gelidos his explicet orbes,
Inque pruinoso coluber distenditur arvo.
Viperei coeunt, abrupto corpore, nodi;
Humanoque cadit serpens afflata veneno. [b]

Phars. Lib. vi.

Huge mountains have been levell'd with the plain,
And far from heav'n has tall Olympus lain.
Riphæan crystal has been known to melt,
And Scythian snows a sudden summer felt.
No longer prest by Cynthia's moister beam,
Alternate Tethys heaves her swelling stream;
By charms forbid, her tides revolve no more,
But shun the margin of the guarded shore.
The pond'rous earth, by magic numbers strook,
Down to her inmost centre deep has shook;
Then rending with a yawn, at once made way,
To join the upper and the nether day;
While wond'ring eyes, the dreadful cleft between,
Another starry firmament have seen.

Rowe's Phars. vi. v. 739.

[b] Each deadly kind by nature form'd to kill,
Fear the dire hags and execute their will.
Lions to them their nobler rage submit,
And fawning tigers couch beneath their feet;
For them the snake foregoes her wint'ry hold,
And on the hoary frost entwines her fold:
The pois'nous race they strike with stronger death,
And blasted vipers die, by human breath.

Ib. v. 777.

But in the conduct of one part of his work, Lucan is truly admirable: it is such as would have done honour to Homer or Virgil in the happiness and originality of the conception, and the skilfulness and judgment of the execution. This great poet foreseeing that the truth of his subject would be sacrificed, if he introduced preternatural agents into the action of his poem; and that, its truth being sacrificed, its importance must be affected in a proportionable degree, not only determined on the entire suppression of the established machinery of epick poetry, but has contrived to profit by the very circumstances of its rejection. For, taking a just estimate of the religious and philosophical opinions of his countrymen, and observing that they were generally at variance, and that the advantage of respectability was decidedly on the side of the latter, he has contrived to exalt the stoical character above the divine nature, as it was represented by his religion, and could have been introduced into his poem; thus raising it above a standard which possessed an intrinsick elevation, he rendered it an object of reverence. Of this godlike perfection has he drawn his Cato, of whom it may be truly said, that he is the superiour

intelligence that informs the action, and upholds the dignity of the poem. And, regarding his character in this light, it is unjust to degrade it by a comparison with the Jupiter of the Iliad, or any other divinity which conducts or elevates the heathen machinery.

With this view we may perceive, that the poet first introduces this character in that memorable comparison which he institutes between him and the deities:

> Victrix causa diis placuit, sed victa Catoni.[c]
>
> Phars. Lib. i. v. 128.

And in the following speech of Cato to Labienus, he has exhibited him with all the majesty of a superiour being.

> Ille Deo plenus, tacitâ quem mente gerebat,
> Effudit dignas adytis e pectore voces.
> "Quid quæri, Labiene, jubes? An liber in armis
> Occubuisse velim potius, quam regna videre?
> An sit vita nihil, sed longam differat ætas?
> An noceat vis ulla bono? Fortunaque perdat
> Oppositâ virtute minas laudandaque velle
> Sit satis, et nunquam successu crescet honestum?
> Scimus, et hoc nobis non altius inseret Ammon.
> Hæremus cuncti superis, temploque tacente

[c] Victorious Cæsar by the gods was crown'd,
The vanquish'd party was by Cato own'd.

Rowe's Phars. i. v. 241.

Nil facimus non sponte Dei: nec vocibus ullis
Numen eget: dixitque semel nascentibus auctor
Quidquid scire licet: stereleis nec legit arenas,
Ut caneret paucis, mersitque hoc pulvere vocem.
Estne Dei sedes nisi terra, et pontus, et aër,
Et cœlum, et virtus? Superos quid quærimus ultra?
Jupiter est quodcunque vides, quocunque moveris.
Sortilegis egeant dubii, semperque futuris
Casibus ancipites: me non oracula certum,
Sed mors certe facit: pavido fortique cadendum est.
Hoc satis est dixisse Jovem." [d]

Phars. Lib. ix.

[d] Full of the God that dwelt within his breast,
The hero thus his secret mind express'd,
And inborn truths reveal'd; truths which might well
Become ev'n oracles themselves to tell.
Where would thy fond, thy vain inquiry go?
What mystic fate, what secret would'st thou know?
Is it a doubt if death should be my doom,
Rather than live till kings and bondage come,
Rather than see a tyrant crown'd in Rome?
Or would'st thou know of what we value here,
Life be a trifle hardly worth our care?
What by old age and length of days we gain,
More than to lengthen out the sense of pain?
Or if this world, with all its forces join'd
The universal malice of mankind,
Can shake or hurt the brave and honest mind?
If stable Virtue can her ground maintain,
While Fortune feebly threats and frowns in vain?
If Truth and Justice with uprightness dwell,
And honesty consist in meaning well?
If right be independent of success,
And conquest cannot make it more nor less?

While engaged on this subject, we may turn to consider the argument which M. de Voltaire, by a perverted application of this cele-

Are these, my friend, the secrets thou wouldst know,
Those doubts for which to oracles we go?
'Tis known, 'tis plain, 'tis all already told,
And horned Ammon can no more unfold.
From God deriv'd, to God by nature join'd,
We act the dictates of his mighty mind;
And though the priests are mute and temples still,
God never wants a voice to speak his will.
When first we from the teeming womb were brought,
With inborn precepts then our souls were fraught
And then the maker his new creatures taught.
Then, when he form'd, and gave us to be men,
He gave us all our useful knowledge then.
Canst thou believe the vast eternal mind
Was ere to Syrts or Libyan sands confin'd?
That he should choose this waste, this barren ground,
To teach the thin inhabitants around,
And leave his truth in wilds and desarts drown'd:
Is there a place that God would choose to love,
Beyond this earth, the seas, yon heav'n above,
And virtuous minds the noblest throne for love?
Why seek we further then? behold around,
How all thou seest does with the God abound,
Jove is alike in all, and always to be found.
Let those weak minds, who live in doubt and fear
To juggling priests for oracles repair;
One certain hour of death to each decreed,
My fix'd, my certain soul from doubt has freed,
The coward and the brave are doom'd to fall;
And when Jove told this truth, he told us all.

B. ix. v. 954.

brated passage in the " Pharsalia," urges against epick machinery in general; not confining his deductions to the historical poem only, but extending them to the poetical epos. " Ceux qui prennent les commencemens d'un art pour les principes de l'art même, sont persuadés qu'un poëme ne saurait subsister sans divinités parceque l'Iliade en est pleine; mais ces divinités sont si peu essentielles au poëme, que le plus bel endroit qui soit dans Lucain, et peut-être dans aucun poëte est le decours de Caton, dans lequel ce Stoïque, ennemi des fables dedaigne d'aller voir le temple de Jupiter Ammon." *

The explanation before given of the conduct of the " Pharsalia," not to insist on the peculiar character of the Roman people, or that of the very remarkable period of their history, from which the subject of that poem is drawn, must be sufficient to prove that this passage affords no general model for the conduct of the epopee. And this consideration alone would be sufficient to expose the unfairness in this reasoning of M. de Voltaire, where he fastens not merely upon this poem itself, but upon a distinguished passage in it,

* Sur la Poes. Epiq. ch. v.

as affording an argument against the necessity of introducing machinery into epick poetry. For though the observation be perfectly just, that Lucan is not only grand beyond all precedent in this passage, but has, generally, maintained a suitable elevation in the whole conduct of his poem; it does not follow, nor is it the case, that the whole compass of history affords another subject capable of being similarly conducted to that of the "Pharsalia."

Nor has the critick taken into account some circumstances of considerable importance, in forming a just estimate of the present question; which having arisen from the change in manners and opinions since the times of the Roman republic, have added as much to the dignity of Lucan's description, as they have taken from the splendour of the antient poetical machinery. The refinement, or indeed effeminacy, of modern manners, has taught us as much to overrate the sternness of that stoical virtue which the poet has undertaken to celebrate; as a total revolution in religious belief has led us to contemn the absurdities which debase that religious system, which he has treated with disregard. From these considerations, the entire of Lu-

can's work acquires an accidental dignity, which contributes not a little to raise the passage, selected by M. de Voltaire, above what is justified even by its intrinsick merit. And of course, this solitary passage, being of itself but peculiarly circumstanced, cannot establish a precedent to evince the truth of his general position, that the poetical epos can support a suitable elevation without the assistance of machinery.

CHAP. IV.

OF THE DRAMA.

THOUGH the machinery of poetry has obtained many strenuous advocates, the propriety of its introduction into dramatick representation has generally been resigned as untenable. Some even of the most liberal of our criticks, have literally ventured to proscribe this part of poetical composition, which comprises so considerable a portion of its finest imagery, as too improbable to be justified by any license of the art. "The tales of faëry are exploded as fantastick and incredible. They would merit this contempt if presented on the stage; if they were given as the proper subjects of dramatick imitation, and the interest of the poet's plot were to be wrought out of the adventures of these marvellous persons.[f]" "A poet who should now make the whole action of his tragedy depend upon enchantment, and produce the chief events

[f] HURD on Chivalry and Romance, Let. X.

by the assistance of supernatural agents, would be censured as transgressing the bounds of probability, be banished from the theatre to the nursery, and condemned to write fairy tales instead of tragedies."[s]

Were these conclusions decisive, the object of our immediate inquiry would be wholly obviated; as it would answer no end to develope first principles, or to lay down rules, where there could arise no opportunity of applying them. It is not necessary to enter into a formal refutation of assumptions so arbitrary. They rest solely on opinion; have been brought to the test of feeling; and have, I think, received a complete refutation in the success with which some modern productions of this kind, and of very inferiour merit, have been received. Had this, however, never been the case, there might be an answer subversive of such conclusions drawn from that unsated avidity with which some established dramas continue to be sought after, where the principal events are conducted by the ministry of those fantastick agents.

It may not be deemed either incurious or unimportant, to offer a few remarks on the

[s] Johnson's Works, Vol. III. p. 82.

origin and cause of this proscription of theatrical machinery, as the inquiry may afford some reasons for confirming to the drama its right to an appendage, which gives so powerful an interest to its representations, and adds so beautiful an embellishment to its scenick decorations.

However various might have been the inducements by which the Grecian dramatick writers were led to introduce divine personages in the scene, one obvious reason assignable for this practice may be suggested—the direct imitation of the epick and mythological poets, into which they were led from taking the subjects of their compositions from such writers. But as the circumstances were sensibly different in which these beings were placed, on being brought from the indistinct representation of narration to the visible disclosure of exhibition, the change was made infinitely for the worse. And this disadvantage operating against their first appearance in the scene, was heightened, in no small degree, by the rude mechanism of the theatrical apparatus among the ancients. Most unskilful must those contrivances have been, that worked the machines in which their deities made their descent or disap-

pearance, when the antient drama, from wanting an expedient to shift its scenes, became confined to a tedious unity of place, in violation of truth and propriety.

Under these circumstances, it must be supposed both Aristotle and Horace viewed the antient theatre; and taking these considerations into account, their seeming to discourage dramatick imagery, may be imputed to their disapprobation of certain defects, not in the theory, but in the established use of theatrical machinery; such, it may be remarked, were defects for which the structure of their theatre led them to imagine, there could be no remedy. This is, I think, very evident, from the reasons which they assign for recommending this appendage of the drama to be removed as much as possible out of theatrical representations. "It is expedient to introduce the marvellous into tragick compositions; but the preternatural, from which principally the marvellous arises, is rather admissible in the epopee, because we do not behold the agency which is employed in it."[h]

[h] Δει μεν ουν εν ταις τραγῳδιαις ποιειν το θαυμαστον· μαλλον δε ενδεχεται εν τῃ εποποιῖᾳ το αλογον, δι ὁ συμβαινει μαλιστα το θαυ-

This passage appears to me rather to recommend than to discourage the employment of dramatick machinery on the modern stage. Some partiality is professed here for marvellous intervention in the drama: it is restricted to a conditional introduction into the scene, on account of an objection which has now no force, as it has no application to the modern theatre. That poetical machinery, though admissible in recital, will not so well bear to be submitted to visible representation, is only true of stage machinery, under the circumstances in which it was viewed by Aristotle. When its effects are aukwardly displayed to the view, the judgment receives from the eye an additional testimony of the improbability of whatever is the subject of its representation. And yet it may be observed, not however as exculpatory of the recent abuses of our theatre, in its display of what is trifling and

μαστον, δια το μη ὁραν εις τον πραττοντα. De Poet. § 43. In this sentence, it is generally supposed, that Horace concurs in the following precept; which, if urged against the practice of the modern stage, admits of the same answer as that of Aristotle.

Nec deus intersit nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit. De Art. Poet, v. 191.

childish in such of its decorations, but as illustrative of the superiority of the modern dramatick mechanism, over any thing of the kind which appeared in the antient theatre; that the exhibitions, which so much offended the judgment of Horace and Aristotle, might be now represented with such skill and splendour, as to surprize and gratify an enlightened audience. And in this consideration, the entire efficacy of that trite rule, of the former critick, which has been often so triumphantly urged against the modern theatre, seems to vanish altogether;

> Ne—in avem Progne vertatur Cadmus in anguem;
> Quodcunque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi.
> De Art. Poet. v. 188.

I do not mean to insist here, that the edge of this stricture may be turned from affecting the modern drama, by observing that these words merely apply to restraining the abuse of theatrical machinery; as the representation which is here censured by the Roman critick, if it be brought to the test of that rule which has been laid down for proving the justness of poetical fictions, will appear as irreconcilable to the belief of the poet's readers, as his characters. Waving this

consideration altogether, it does not appear that the objection would apply to this exhibition, if presented in a modern theatre; for in point of that improbability against which Horace exclaims, I can observe little difference between converting a man into a serpent, and a pumpkin into a coach and horses, as we have witnessed in our theatres.

In entering into this defence of theatrical machinery, I would thus shelter it from the apparent objections of Aristotle and Horace, rather by admitting their opinions to be right according to circumstances, than by undertaking to prove them altogether erroneous. And yet I am not unconscious, that with respect to refuting one at least, perhaps the most formidable of the exceptions urged against its propriety, I should not want countenance from two poets, both of them no common masters of dramatick effect. To this character, it remains not for me to establish the claims of Corneille and Metastasio, both of whom seem to have believed the machine of Medea's flying car in Euripides, perfectly conformable to verisimilitude,[1] although supposed to be condemned by Aristotle.

[1] Metastasio Estrat. dell. Poet d'Aristot. cap. XV.

Yet, while the opinions of Horace and Aristotle remained thus misunderstood, and were urged with the greatest force against dramatick machinery, it preserved its popularity, superiour to every opposition. Much of its success in this respect, it must be owned, is to be attributed to the exquisite art with which it was informed and directed by Shakespeare's magick. And though it may be regarded as a kind of irreverence to start a doubt, that the influence of those productions, with which he, as it were, enlarged the bounds of poetry, must not have proved irresistible; or to suggest, that they required any extraneous recommendation, independent of the art and chasteness with which they were constructed as fictions: yet, so powerful were the disadvantages with which machinery had to contend, that it is my opinion, even Shakespeare's magick would have sunk under the opposition of that artificial taste and fastidious judgment, which we have been led to adopt, among other French fopperies, had it not received some external support from beautiful scenery and artful mechanism. However, from the independence which we have evinced in shaking off our trammels, and in asserting the right of thinking for ourselves in this mat-

ter, foreigners have been first led to examine, and, lastly, to admit the propriety and elegance of our theatrical imagery. And so completely has its triumph over all opposition been finally established, that it is curious to observe the first just criticism, and warm panegyrick of Shakespear's dramatick enchantments, come from the hands of M. de Voltaire,[k] who had not only professed a decided hostility to poetical machinery in the epopee, but who seemed determined to allow scarcely any other merit to the English drama.

After having adjusted this point, a convenient opportunity presents itself for discharging an engagement in which I stand pledged to the reader.[l] As I formerly had occasion to observe,[m] much of the improbability of fictitious narrative is justifiable on the grounds of the subject not passing in view of the reader; for, making in this form a less distinct impression on the mind, it becomes proportionably difficult to detect any deviation from truth or nature, which may be attempted in such compositions. But in theatrical representation, where an appeal is directly made

[k] Dissert sur la Tragéd. Anc. et Mod. P. iii. [l] See page 138.
[m] See page 183.

to the senses, this reasoning can have no application: the evidence to which the composition becomes in this case exposed, seems rather calculated to counteract than heighten its effect in the exhibition. By this circumstance, however, it will eventually appear, that the romantick drama is very little, if at all effected. The objection would have some force, and such an effect might be apprehended from the representation of marvellous action and character, if such were addressed to the senses merely. The formality of scenick representation has, it must be confessed, a tendency to impress the spectator with a sense of the representation's being unreal and supposititious; which becomes proportionably liable to observation, as the subject deviates from truth or probability. But in this statement it is not taken into account, that productions of the romantick kind address themselves not merely to the senses, but to the emotions. Surprize and admiration constitute the end of fanciful composition; and over these affections, the scenick apparatus exerts as sensible a power, as dramatick gesture and action exercise over the passions of pity and terrour. On the advantage with which the latter may be em-

ployed, in beguiling the spectator into a temporary forgetfulness of the want of truth in the exhibition, I have already descanted;[n] the former seem not less capable of being converted to the same purpose. The splendour of the spectacle, when it is not carried to a childish excess, is highly calculated to contribute to our delight; and the seeming improbabilities which we see accomplished by the mechanism, together with the secrecy of the means by which so much is effected, tend to throw us into a state of uncollected astonishment. This is sufficiently attested by the feeling which attracts crowds to such exhibitions; notwithstanding all that an affectation of a chaste and severe judgment may dispose the majority of those, who sit out such representations, to profess to the contrary. When the effect which is produced by theatrical magick transcends our expectation, from its greatness or novelty; when it is conducted with that art and rapidity of execution, which conceals the secret springs of the action, and leaves the mind no time to calculate on the mode of operation, surprize and admiration must be the result of the

[n] See page 138.

exhibition. It is but to little purpose to object, that we must be conscious the effect produced is but mechanical. We may admit the fact, without any detriment to the main argument, for even, when regarded in this light, the representation is calculated to excite our wonder, and contribute to our gratification. The truth is, however, that we are not left any time or inclination for indulging any such speculations; and that when they do obtrude themselves on the mind, they cause no very sensible diminution of our pleasure: as they still leave much to excite our surprize, at the art and ingenuity of the contrivance. It may be doubted, on the whole, whether the state of mental emotion into which we are thrown by the deception, does not entitle such exhibitions to a stronger claim than any whatever, of approaching perfect theatrical delusion, and probably, on the very account of having been submitted to the scrutiny of the sense, which finds itself baffled in detecting the delusiveness.

From the determination of this point, the transition is easy and regular to an investigation of the extent to which a dramatick poet may proceed, in making use of machinery. And here two points in particular, analogous

to those which have been already determined in discussing the nature of epical imagery, require our consideration, as included in the question of what limits are prescribed to Poetick Licence.

I. Among the different mythological systems founded on religious belief and superstitious credulity, to the creed of what particular people should the poet's choice be confined?

II. At what particular periods is he permitted to introduce the spiritual agents, thus chosen, among the natural incidents of his work?

I. Of these two questions, the first has been sufficiently resolved in the rule which has been already laid down for determining the nature, and marking out the extent of marvellous fiction in the romantick epos.° The same attention, which has been there recommended, and, on account of the reasons there suggested, should be paid, in the present case, to the religious scruples of the spectator; the same advantage should be taken of the superstitious credulity of the poetical characters. And a few considera-

° See page 173.

tions will fully justify the application of such a principle to the present exigency. As far as the drama is intended to please merely in the perusal, for which the poet should ever make a suitable provision, the case admits of slight consideration; it is similarly circumstanced with the romantick epos, and may be consequently admitted to be subject to the same restrictions, and entitled to equal immunities. Nor does the case become materially altered, when it is not read but represented; the person whom it is intended to interest and affect, is possessed of the same taste and feelings when he is a spectator, as when he becomes a reader: what would gratify him in the one case, would be likely to gratify him in the other. It may be at least assumed, that if the rule in question be violated, and any thing be represented which is either inconsistent with his religious belief, or irreconcilable with the credulity of the agents in the drama, it must fail, so far at least, in its end of producing pleasure, from the disregard which is evinced in it to propriety and verisimilitude.

To the practice of Shakespeare we may appeal, in order to confirm and illustrate the foregoing principles, and to justify their being

offered as a guide to the poet who introduces marvellous machinery into dramatick action. Of the four pieces in which he has employed supernatural agency, three are constructed with an exact conformity to the rule which has been laid down for the management of celestial intervention in the theatre; the fourth, it must be admitted, deviates from it in one particular, and has been, in that respect, generally, though perhaps inconsiderately, censured as defective. The ghost, witches, and magician, to whose ministration the poet commits the management of the supernatural incidents of his romantick dramas, were generally admitted by the superstitions of the different people among whom he lays the scene of his action. So far consonant was the belief of the former to the superstitious notions of the Danes and Scots, of whom the principal characters of his "Hamlet" and "Macbeth" are composed, that the fable of these dramas is on record in the history of both nations.[p] With equal propriety, the principal characters of the "Tempest" have been chosen from among

[p] BUCHAN. Rer. Scot. Hist. lib. vii. SAX. GRAMMAT. Hist. Dan. lib. iii.

the Italians. Those who are but moderately versed in the poetry of this people, need not be informed, that the enchantment employed in that drama, was the species of marvellous operation most conformable to their vulgar superstitions, and most grateful to the popular opinion. Such notions having been originally imported from the East, were propagated, at an early period, in Italy, among those countries of Europe, where romantick poetry was first successfully cultivated.

It is not to be dissembled that the "Midsummer Night's Dream" affords but a partial exemplification of the principles which are here inculcated; the same attention not having been shewn in it to the superstitious prejudices of the poet's characters, as to the popular notions of his readers. To this statement, I am of opinion, the objections raised against this wonderful drama are properly reducible: for it seems to afford no support to the assertion of those criticks, who, on its evidence, accuse the inimitable authour of confounding the Gothick and Gentile superstitions. In such a charge, his practice is certainly misrepresented; which, to speak of it with the utmost rigour, extended merely to grafting a Gothick machine on a Grecian fable.

And, however inconsistent such a project may seem, much may be said in its vindication. For it should not be forgotten, that in the popular creed, nay in the religious belief of Shakespeare's age, the nymphs of the classical mythology and the fairies of the Gothick imagery were conceived to be the same beings;[q] having been equally supposed to be the apostate spirits [r] who assumed different appearances, in different climes and ages, in order to impose upon the credulity of the vulgar. To those who maintained such opinions, it could not have appeared inconsistent to describe such beings, as having presented themselves in the shape of fairies to

[q] "I will now come to treat of the *Nymphs of the Ancients*, which are those whom we at this day doe call Fées, and the Italians Fate, *in English Fayries*." Le Loier. Treat. of Appar. p. 17.

[r] "*Terrestrial devils* are those Lares, Genii, *Fauns, Satyres, Wood-nymphs*, Foliots, *Fairies, Robin-good fellows*, Trulli, &c. which as they are most conversant with men, so they do them most harm.—Some put *our Fairies* into this rank, which have been adored with much superstition, with sweeping their houses, and setting a pail with cleane water, good victuals and the like, and then they should not be pinched, but finde money in their shoes, and be fortunate in their enterprizes. These are they that dance on heathes and greenes—and leave that green circle which we commonly finde in plain fields." Burt. Anat. of Melanch. P. II. S. ii. m. 1. subs. 2. See what has been already advanced on this subject, page 239. n. [w]. page 242. n. [z].

the Grecian peasantry; and few, it is to be hoped, of those who admit the insufficiency of Pagan divinities to gain general attention, will condemn the poet who manifested a preference to the more probable and fascinating enchantments of the national mythology. In this respect, at least, Shakespeare appears to have acted with judgment, in consulting the feelings of his spectators; for thus he presented them with a more probable system of machinery, and to the exclusion of one which could have afforded them little comparative gratification. And in proceeding thus far, he seems not to have been destitute of a precedent of high poetical authority. Chaucer, acting on the same principle, set him the example of naturalizing those images in poetry; having maintained similar notions with respect to the identity of the nymphs and fairies, he introduced the latter into a Grecian story.

If, however, it be still objected, that the poet might have equally consulted the gratification of his readers, while he escaped every imputation of inconsistency, by shifting the scene of his action to a different country, and referring the date of the transaction to a more recent period: still the objection, if admitted,

must be allowed to lose much of its force, when it is properly directed, as it must fall partly on the age in which the drama was written. At this period, nothing of the fanciful kind was relished among theatrical exhibitions, which was not founded on superstitions which were deemed respectable from being classical. Of such subjects exclusively was the Mask composed, as this species of poetry was cultivated by Jonson, and his brethren of the "learned sock." With this taste, of course, Shakespeare was in some measure necessitated to comply, when, charmed with the fine images of his native superstitions, he formed the bold project of retaining the Pagan subject of such poetry, and incorporating with it a more probable system of preternatural agency taken from the Gothick mythology. And when we estimate the extraordinary art evinced by the poet, in managing a subject so disadvantageously circumstanced, we shall probably discover more in his practice to commend than to censure.

When we argue the question, even on the most unfavourable ground, namely, that on which the poet is accused of impropriety, in adopting a system of machinery, which was

irreconcilable to the belief of the characters in his drama, it promises no unsuccessful issue to the cause of Shakespeare. It is, indeed, of considerable importance in his defence, to examine how far the charge really extends. The fact is, as may be observed on a casual inspection of the production, that this impropriety has been avoided by the poet, and with a degree of carefulness, which proves his practice not to be the effect of accident. It is only as they regard the spectator, that the preternatural agents appear in a Gothick character; as they regard the agents in the poem, they may be conceived fauns as well as fairies: so far the superstitious notions of the latter really suffered no violation, while the popular prejudices of the former were virtually consulted in the alteration.

The address of the poet is, indeed, particularly deserving of note, in the management of this part of his subject. He contrives to give the occurrences of the drama, in the opinion of the human agents employed in it, no greater reality than what is possessed by a dream: as indeed he entitles the production. Some of the leading characters he represents as rejecting the whole of the

transaction as purely fictitious, and ascribing the delusion of the parties concerned, to natural causes;

THES. I never may believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers, and madmen, have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.—
Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or, in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear?
Act v. sc. 1.

When he introduces his elves as addressing some of the principal characters, it is in the assumed voice, and borrowed person of their associates; their intervention, in this respect, is thus projected by the chief of the fairies:

OBER. Hie, therefore, Robin, overcast the night;
The starry welkin cover thou anon
With drooping fog, as black as Acheron;
And lead these testy rivals so astray,
As one come not within another's way.
Like to Lysander sometime frame thy tongue,
Then stir Demetrius up with bitter wrong;
And sometime rail thou like Demetrius;
And from each other look thou lead them thus,

Till o'er their brows death-counterfeiting sleep
With leaden legs and batty wings, doth creep;
Then crush this herb into Lysander's eye,
Whose liquor hath this virtuous property,
To take from thence all errour, with his might,
And make his eye-balls roll with wonted sight.
When they next wake all this derision
Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision;
And back to Athens shall the lovers wend,
With league, whose date till death shall never end.
Act iii. sc. 2.

It is to an illiterate mechanick alone that he represents his spiritual agents as being visibly manifested; yet even he is dismissed under the impression that all that he witnessed is the effect of a dream.

[*As they go out Bottom awakes.*]

" ——Hey, ho!—Peter Quince! Flute, the bellows-mender! Snout, the tinker! Starveling! God's my life! stolen hence, and left me asleep! I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream;—past the wit of man to say what dream it was: man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had.—But man is but a patch'd fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen; man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream."— Act iv. sc. 1.

Thus it is not to be disputed, that Shakespeare has not only had so much respect to the superstitious notions of his characters as not to offer them any open violence; but from the state of mental delusion in which he supposes them placed, his fictions are rendered as probable as seemed possible; indeed perfectly so on the part of those who may be conceived at all concerned in believing them, and with whose opinions they are supposed to be at variance. That in this process he has left the spectator no reasonable grounds of complaints, in introducing those beings to his observation, which were favoured by his popular prejudices, in preference to the deities of a mythology which he must have rejected as impossible, need not be any longer insisted on. Upon the whole, while, in vindication of that rule which he has here cited to illustrate, it may be observed, that his practice would have approached more near to perfection had he adhered more closely to its letter: it must be at the same time allowed, that he cannot be convicted of running counter to its spirit.

It seems scarcely necessary to prolong the consideration of the present question with another observation, relative to the impro-

priety of introducing that machinery into the drama which is exclusively adapted to the poetical epos: although it is that which is most consonant to the belief of the poet's characters, as well as his readers or spectators. Whatever may be its perfections in this respect, although it is particularly calculated to awaken the spectator's interest, and to excite his admiration, it seems to be for ever excluded from finding a place on our stages. To entertainments of the theatrical kind, we can allow, among intellectual amusements, no higher praise than that of being elegant or rational; and even to this commendation they seem to be but rarely entitled: but the sacred beings by whose ministration, we are taught to believe, Providence has engaged in sublunary affairs, are not to be regarded without sentiments of reverence; we cannot therefore easily pardon the attempt of him who would so far degrade them as to ascribe them a part in the action of a fable, which was merely intended to promote amusement, and on a stage which has been often prostituted to the worst purposes. Such a project, if realized, we should condemn as profane; and surely the production on which we should pass such a sentence, however it

might excite our disgust or horrour, could contribute nothing to our gratification. By this limitation, however, the drama is not so materially affected as may be at first imagined: such subjects as find a place in it generally consist in events of that secondary importance, that they cannot be supposed to engage the celestial interference, if with any propriety they could be committed to the celestial superintendance.

II. From the determination of these points I proceed, in order, to the discussion of that which was proposed for examination in the second place; when a poet is at liberty to introduce the spiritual agency among the actual incidents of his composition.

This is a question of which there has been offered more than one solution: for the mechanism of the antient theatre being of that unskilful and inconvenient kind, which discouraged the introduction of their divinities into the dramatick action, to exclude them as much as possible from appearing in the scene, became a desirable object to the poet and the spectator. As machinery was on this account scarcely employed, unless when there was an absolute

necessity for its introduction, the antient criticks have laid down rules which reduce the times of its employment to the fewest possible number; and the moderns, with an implicit attachment to their authority, have taken up their principles, and endeavoured to square and apply them to the existing state of the drama.

Among the first of these, Aristotle directs that no divinity should be introduced for the mere purpose of unravelling a knot in the intrigue of the plot. It seems to be a fundamental principle of his criticism, that the incidents of the story should unfold themselves in a natural train. To preserve this principle inviolable, he directs, that if a deity is introduced, for the purpose of making a disclosure, it should be something which happens out of the dramatick action; at the same time premising that it should be something necessary to the intelligence of the subject, and such as a spiritual intelligence can be supposed to know.* By the

* Φανερον ουν και τας λυσεις των μυθων εξ αυτυ μυθυ συμβαινειν, και μη ωσπερ εν τη Μηδεια απο μηχανης, και εν τη Ιλιαδι τα περι τον αποπλουν· αλλα μηχανη χρηστεον επι τα εξω τυ δραματος, η οσα προ τυ γεγονεν, α εχ οιον τε ανθρωπον ειδεναι, η οσα υστερον α δειται προαγορευσεως και αγγελιας· απαντα γαρ αποδιδομεν τοις

former part of this observation he makes a provision, that the contexture of the fable shall not be interrupted by marvellous intervention; as by the latter he takes precaution, that a divinity shall not be introduced on a trivial or unnecessary occasion. Of this principle it may be remarked, that it is exemplified in "Hamlet," and, generally speaking, in "Macbeth:" but it extends not to the machinery employed in the other dramas of Shakespeare; nor indeed, as the Abbate Metastasio has observed, to the practice of the Greek theatre. So far it may be allowed to be a principle too confined in its application for the general purposes of poetry; in which light it seems not to have been recommended by its authour.

The steps of Aristotle, as has been frequently observed, are followed by Horace, who prohibits the use of a machine unless for the purpose of solving some important difficulty in the action;

> Nec deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus
> Inciderit.
>
> De Art. Poet. v. 191.

θεοις ὁραν. Αλογον δε μηδεν ειναι εν τοις πραγμασιν· ει δε μη, εξω της τραγωδιας· διον το εν τω Οιδιποδι τω Σοφοκλεους.

De Poet. § 28.

It has been observed by the Abbate Metastasio on this rule, that it is the best which can be given to persons possessed of a good judgment; without which, he subjoins, every precept is not only useless but may be dangerous. With much greater pertinency he objects to it on another occasion; " Ma egli non c'insegna quali circostanze debba avere questo nodo per meritare d'essere disciolto da un nume." [t] Which is a remark that throws the question back to its original difficulty.

Nor does it appear that the solution, which the same critick has offered elsewhere of this difficulty, is at all satisfactory. " Io non saprei a qual canone, o a quale esempio autorevole ottenermi per far uso regolare delle machine suddette, se non mi determinassi a credere, che la grandezza, e la maestà d'un soggetto, e l'eroica dignità de' personaggi introdotti, e supposti in ispezial cura de' numi, vagliano a rendere analogo, e connesso questo mirabile col verisimile." [u] But surely something more is requisite, to justify the introduction of preternatural

[t] Metastasio. Not. all' Art. Poet. d' Oraz. v. 191.
[u] Id. ibid.

agency into the scene, and to guide the poet in the management of it than a rule from which it may be inferred that the action would be benefited by its exclusion; for a dramatick subject might be unravelled without such aid, in a manner to which the critick has given a decided preference; "E indubitato, come lo asserisce Aristotele, che quella è la più artificiosa, e commendabile catastrofe, la quale scioglie il viluppo d'una favola, nascendo intrinsecamente dal corso della favola medesima: il modo che il popolo, che non l'aspettava, riflettendo alle cose, da lui nel corso della rappresentazione ascoltate, e vedute, si trovi convinto, che dovea quello scioglimento necessariamente, e verisimilmente succedere."[v]

It appears to me that the matter is brought somewhat nearer an issue by the explanation of M. de Voltaire, who proceeds on the grounds taken by Horace, and with a like reference to the opinion of Aristotle; "Je voudrais que de telles hardiesses ne fusent employée que quand elles servent à la fois a mettre dans la piéce de l'intrigue, et de la terreur: et je voudrais, sur tout, que

[v] Id. ibid. See also Estrat. dell. Poet. d' Aristot. cap. xv.

l'invention de ces êtres surnaturels ne parût pas absolument necessaire. Je m' explique: si le nœud d'un poëme tragique est tellement embrouillé qu'on ne puisse se tirer d'embarras que par le secours d'un prodige, le spectateur sent la gêne où l'auteur s'est mis, et la faiblesse de la resource. Il ne voit qu'un écrivain qui se tire mal-adroitment d'un mauvais pas. Plus d'illusion, plus d'interêt. Quodcunque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi. Mais je suppose que l'auteur d'un tragédie se fût proposé pour but d'avertir les hommes, que Dieu punit quelquefois de grands crimes par des voies extraordinaires; je suppose que sa piéce fût conduite avec un tel art, que le spectateur attendit à tout moment l'ombre d'un prince assassiné, qui demande vengeance, sans que cette apparition fût une resource absolument necéssaire à une intrigue embarrassée: je dis qu' alors ce prodige, bien ménagé, ferait un tres grand effet en toute langue, en tous tems, et en tout pays."[w]

From these desultory remarks the solution of the question before us may be extracted. The necessity of enforcing the ob-

[w] Voltaire. Dissert. sur la Tragéd. Anc. et Mod. P. III.

servance of these precepts on writers, may be clearly evinced from a few obvious considerations arising from the peculiar nature of that species of composition in which dramatick action is combined with marvellous imagery. In such compositions, as I have already observed, powerful emotion becomes necessary to sustain the parade and formality of scenick exhibition. The peculiar passions by which they thus aim at securing our gratification, are, that interest which arises from the artful involution of the plot, and that admiration which is excited by the marvellous nature of the imagery. And it is to preserve these qualities undiminished, that a strict regard should be paid to the several precepts of the above-cited criticks. In order that the drama should not suffer in its interest by the introduction of a machine, it is expedient to observe the precept of Aristotle; but, in order that it should profit by its employment, due attention should be paid to the injunction of M. de Voltaire. For it is evident, that the artful contexture of events in the fable must be impaired when a divinity is introduced for the sole purpose of unravelling some intricacy in the plot; and that it will be contrariwise im-

proved, when, by its intervention, more intrigue and emotion are thrown into the dramatick action. But that the admiration, excited by the incidents as preternatural should remain unimpaired, respect should be had to the precept of Horace; and if the poet would turn his machinery to the best account, he must find it his object to follow the suggestion of the Abbate Metastasio. For here also, if the event is of a trivial kind, and unworthy the attention of a divinity; if it be such as lies within the power of unassisted human agency to accomplish, it must necessarily excite, by its insignificance, a sensation contrary to that of admiration, and leave a full impression of inconsistency on the mind of the spectator, from the manifest disproportion which will be thus placed between the end to be effected, and the means by which it is accomplished.

That a machine should be at all used, this precept, at the least, should be attended to; some intricacy should exist which required the solution of a divinity, some difficulty to be surmounted which required the interference of preternatural power. The practice of Shakespeare, in any one of his dramas, will serve to illustrate and exem-

plify this principle. The restoration of Prospero to his dukedom, situated, as he is represented in the "Tempest," on a desolate island, without friends or resources, was not to be effected, unless by means of celestial intervention; in employing preternatural agency to accomplish that end, the poet seems consequently to have acted with the justest propriety. Without the interposition of some superiour agent the murderer of the King of Denmark, and the usurper of his throne and bed, could not be detected and punished: from these considerations "Hamlet" seems to display equal propriety, in its use of marvellous imagery, as the "Tempest."

But the drama, in which this point is secured, has attained but the negative merit of which machinery is susceptible. It still remains for the poet, who has thus established his right to introduce it into his compositions, to employ it with the greatest effect. The course which he must follow in this case, cannot be more clearly or safely marked out, than by examining the conduct of Shakespeare in a similar undertaking. For this purpose we may select the tragedy

of " Macbeth," as a model of perfection. On the task of analysing this inimitable drama I enter with the greater willingness, not less from the support which it affords the conclusions that I have adopted on the present question, than the honour which it reflects on the genius of its incomparable authour. It is a matter of considerable, yet grateful, surprise to observe the exact conformity which exists between his practice, and the deductions of criticks, with whose opinions he could have had no acquaintance. And on the other hand it must afford no inconsiderable evidence of the justice of those deductions to find them confirmed by a poet, in whose voice Nature spoke as from her oracle. To paint the fatal effects of that

Vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself[x]

is the professed end of the tragedy of " Macbeth." This is judiciously brought about, by representing the hero, as having his evil propensity excited by a superstitious prognostication: as led on to the perpetration

[x] Act i. sc. 7.

of the greatest atrocities by a promise that was equivocal, and finally precipitated on destruction in the pursuit of a good that was delusive. But considering the seemingly insurmountable obstacles which lay between Macbeth and the quiet possession of that sovereignty after which he aspired, neither the perpetration of the murder which exhibits the dreadful effects of his ambition, nor the succeeding ruin by which it was punished on him and his family, could have probably taken place, as the plot is conducted, without the intervention of preternatural power. From hence originated those hopes of success which urged the tyrant to carry his criminal designs into execution. And from hence only could proceed that confidence of security which first led him to brave approaching danger, and ultimately produced that despondency, which diminished his power to resist it.

The fable of the tragedy seems consequently to resolve itself into two parts; that which regards the usurpation of Macbeth, and that which regards his fall and punishment. And both of these have a necessary dependance on the preternatural agency.

In the first instance, the witches ad-

dress Macbeth by those titles which he is afterwards led to usurp, by his ambition;

1. WITCH. All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis!
2. WITCH. All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!
3. WITCH. All hail, Macbeth! that shall be king hereafter.

Act i. sc. 3.

And they raise that illusive appearance, and utter that ambiguous prophecy, which, after he had perpetrated the murder of Duncan, hastened his destruction, by inspiring him with a vain security: this is the intention avowed by Hecate;

Upon the corner of the moon
There hangs a vaporous drop profound;
I'll catch it ere it come to ground:
And that distill'd by magick slights,
Shall raise such artificial sprights,
As by the strength of their illusion,
Shall draw him on to his confusion;
He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear
His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear:
And you all know, security
Is mortals' chiefest enemy.

Act iii. sc. 5.

And in conformity to this intention is the prophecy subsequently uttered to Macbeth, which has the desired effect of in-

spiring him with that security which occasioned his fall.

MACB. How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags,
What is't you do?
WITCHES. A deed without a name.
MACB. I conjure you, by that which you profess,
(Howe'er you come to know it,) answer me;
To what I ask you.
1. WITCH. Speak.
2. WITCH. Demand.
3. WITCH. We 'll answer.
Say if thou'dst rather hear it from our mouths,
Or from our masters'?
MACB. Call them, let me see them.
1. WITCH. Pour in sow's blood that hath eaten
Her nine farrow; grease, that's sweaten
From the murd'rer's gibbet, throw
Into the flame.
ALL. Come, high, or low
Thyself and office deftly show.

(Thunder. An apparition of an armed head rises.)

MACB. Tell me, thou unknown pow'r,—
1. WITCH. He knows thy thought;
Hear his speech, but say thou nought.
APPAR. Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! beware Macduff;
Beware the thane of Fife. Dismiss me: enough. [*Descends.*
MACB. Whate'er thou art, for thy good caution thanks;

Thou hast harp'd my fear aright:—but one word more:—

1. WITCH. He will not be commanded: here's another
More potent than the first.

(Thunder. An apparition of a bloody child rises.)

APPAR. Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth!—
Be bloody, bold, and resolute: laugh to scorn
The pow'r of man; for none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth. [*Descends.*

MACB. Then live, Macduff; what need I fear of thee?
But yet I'll make assurance doubly sure,
And take a bond of fate; thou shalt not live;—

(Thunder. An apparition of a child crowned, with a tree in his hand, rises.)

APPAR. Be lion-mettled, proud; and take no care
Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are:
Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be, until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him. [*Descends.*

MACB. That will never be:
Who can impress the forest; bid the tree
Unfix his earth-bound root? sweet bodements! good!
Rebellious head, rise never, till the wood
Of Birnam rise, and our high-plac'd Macbeth
Shall live the lease of nature, pay his breath
To time, and mortal custom.—

Act iv. sc. 1.

Such are the principal incidents which constitute the machinery of "Macbeth;"

and justify the adoption of such imagery in that drama. Our immediate object is to observe its influence on the natural train of events in the fable: and here it is first deserving of remark, that while the mysteriousness in which the predictions, thus uttered, are involved, and the curiosity excited to discover how they may be likely to terminate, imparts more intrigue to the plot and greater interest to the story; the natural train of the incidents, as consisting of events arising out of each other by means probable or necessary, is not disturbed or impeded.

This seems generally evident on reviewing the passages already adduced. From them it appears, that the witches perform nothing themselves, they advise nothing to be undertaken, and afford no aid in any thing that is purposed, which at all contributes to advance or retard the action. The magical rites which they employ, and the obscure prophecies which they utter, have no direct tendency of this kind. But the same position will be more satisfactorily established by an induction of particular passages, made for the purpose of shewing how entirely the action is forwarded without the aid of preternatural interference.

For this purpose, it may be in the first place observed, that of all that the witches disclose, it is the declaration of a known fact alone which operates on Macbeth, and disposes him to action. Before they hail him thane of Cawdor, the spectator is acquainted, that he was to be saluted with this title, according to the intention expressed by his sovereign.

DUNCAN. No more that thane of Cawdor shall deceive
Our bosom interest:—Go, pronounce his death,
And with his former title greet Macbeth.
Act i. sc. 2.

While the messengers are employed in carrying this intention into execution, and conveying the intelligence to Macbeth, the interview takes place between him and the witches; and it is this circumstance of all that they relate which chiefly attracts his notice;

MACB. Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more:
By Sinel's death, I know, I'm thane of Glamis;
But how of Cawdor? the thane of Cawdor lives,
A prosperous gentleman; and, to be king,
Stands not within the prospect of belief,

No more than to be Cawdor. Say, from whence
You owe this strange intelligence?
Act i. sc. 3.

But they do not delay to answer this question, or tend to remove any part of the curiosity, excited by their previous salutation, and expressed in this interrogation. After a short interval, the messengers of Duncan are introduced, who discharge their commission independent of any thing which is effected by the preternatural agency.

ANGUS. We are sent,
To give thee from our royal master thanks;—
ROSSE. And for an earnest of a greater honour,
He bade me, from him, call thee thane of Cawdor;
In which addition, hail, most worthy thane!
For it is thine. Ibid.

This declaration is at first received by Macbeth with doubt, as one who did not rely implicitly on what the witches promised.

MACB. The thane of Cawdor lives; why do you dress me
In borrow'd robes? Ibid.

His doubts are, however, naturally dispelled on learning that the thane of Cawdor

was attainted for rebellion; and this circumstance is, as naturally, believed to contain some confirmation of the former predictions, and some earnest of their final accomplishment;

> MACB. Glamis, and thane of Cawdor:
> The greatest is behind.—Two truths are told,
> As happy prologues to the swelling act
> Of the imperial theme.—I thank you, gentlemen.—
> This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill; cannot be good;—if ill,
> Why hath it giv'n me earnest of success,
> Commencing in a truth? I'm thane of Cawdor:— Act i. sc. 3.

Thus it appears that the declaration of a known fact, which would have been imparted in the natural train of events, if not marvellously communicated, is all that is virtually effected by the higher agents in the commencement of this inimitable drama; while these beings are indirectly instrumental in urging the hero on an enterprize of no common magnitude or difficulty; and while, from the artful manner in which they make this disclosure, they throw so much of the mysterious and terrible into the passionate effect of the piece as to awaken the surprise, and rivet the attention of the spectator.

Equally independent of preternatural interference is the plot laid and carried into execution. The declarations of the witches beget at first, on the part of Macbeth, only feelings of horrour at the atrocity of the crime, by which alone there seemed to be any prospect of their predictions being realized. Shrinking from the idea of invading the throne through the blood of his sovereign, he seems to rely upon chance for the accomplishment of what they promised;

> MACB. This supernatural soliciting
> Cannot be ill; cannot be good;—
> If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
> Against the use of nature? Present fears
> Are less than horrible imaginings:
> My thought, whose murder is fantastical
> Shakes so my single state of man, that function
> Is smothered in surmise;—
> If chance will have me king, why, chance may
> crown me,
> Without my stir. Act. i. sc. 3.

In this light he communicates the particulars of his interview with the witches to his wife; merely that she "might not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of

what greatness was promised him."[7] But he seems to be not yet disposed to follow up the prognostication; and she augurs that no exertion was likely to follow, on his part, from the assurances which he had received of future aggrandisement;

L. Macb. Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promis'd:—yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness,
To catch the nearest way: thou would'st be great;
Art not without ambition; but without
The illness should attend it. What thou would'st highly,
That would'st thou holily; would'st not play false,
And yet would'st wrongly win:—

Act i. sc. 5.

The project of securing the crown by exciting him to the murder of Duncan, originates with herself, while Macbeth is at a distance;

L. Macb. Hie thee hither
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,

[7] Act i. sc. 5.

Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.

Act i. sc. 5.

It is accordingly imparted to her husband, who enters into her designs not without some reluctance: nay, she claims the exclusive privilege of setting the affair in that train which was to ensure its success:

MACB. My dearest love,
Duncan comes here to night;
L. MACB. And when goes hence?
MACB. To-morrow, as he purposes.
L. MACB. O, never
Shall sun that morrow see!—He that's coming
Must be provided for: and you shall put
This night's great business into my dispatch;
Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.

Ibid.

But Macbeth still remains undetermined and irresolute;

MACB. We will speak further.
L. MACB. Only look up clear;
To alter favour ever is to fear;
Leave all the rest to me. Ibid.

The whole of Macbeth's conduct exhibits a violent contest between passion and conscience, in which he seems most inclined

to attend to the voice of the latter; suitably to what it suggests, he forms that determination, in which he wishes his wife to rest, previously to the arguments which she so powerfully urges to inspire him with greater resolution;

MACB. We will proceed no further in this business:
He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon. Act i. sc. 7.

It is from this declaration that she takes occasion to make that irresistible appeal to his affection and his spirit, which stifles the last remonstrances of virtue in the sense of false honour and false shame. On the exquisite art which is displayed in the conduct of the whole scene I need not here enlarge, as it rather exhibits the author's power over the passions, than illustrates his address in interweaving the plot; it is merely necessary for my purpose to observe, that Lady Macbeth is completely successful in undermining his best resolutions, and in confirming him in the intention of entering into her designs;

MACB. I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
Ibid.

The resolution thus formed is accordingly carried into effect by probable and necessary means; so that the plot is not only laid, but conducted without the interposition of the preternatural agents. On these events, it would be foreign from my purpose to dwell with minuteness; it is sufficient to observe, that, in the same manner the murder of Duncan is perpetrated; Macbeth is invested with the sovereignty; and steps are taken to remove those who stood between him and the quiet possession of the kingdom. In the mean time, Malcolm and Macduff, who consult their safety by flight, solicit succours from the English court, and concert measures for deposing the usurper. But Macbeth, placing a reliance in that prophecy which was uttered by the witches to betray him into a vain security, undervalues the danger which menaces him in this direction; the first intelligence which he receives of the approach of the enemy is treated by him with disregard.

MACB. Bring me no more reports; let them fly all:
Till Birnam wood remove to Dunsinane,
I cannot taint with fear. What's the boy
Malcolm?

Was he not born of woman? The spirits that know
All mortal consequents, pronounc'd me thus;
"Fear not, Macbeth; no man that's born of woman
Shall e'er have pow'r on thee."— Act 5. sc. 3.

From this time, the plot begins to unravel itself; and in the same natural process as that in which it was involved. The first part of the predictions of the witches, is not unintentionally fulfilled by a command given from Malcolm to the soldiers of Siward, as they advanced to attack the castle of Dunsinane;

SIW. What wood is this before us?
MENT. The wood of Birnam.
MALC. Let ev'ry soldier hew him down a bough,
And bear't before him; thereby shall we shadow
The numbers of our host, and make discov'ry
Err in report of us. Ibid. sc. 4.

And this circumstance when communicated to Macbeth has that effect which was intended by the weird sisters;

MESS. As I did stand my watch upon the hill,
I look'd toward Birnam, and anon, methought,
The wood began to move.
MACB. Liar and slave.—If thou speak'st false,
Upon the next tree shalt thou hang alive,
Till famine cling thee; if thy speech be sooth,
I care not if thou dost for me as much.
Ibid. sc. 5.

But the communication gives the first shake to his resolution;

I pull in resolution; and begin
To doubt th' equivocation of the fiend,
That lies like truth: "Fear not till Birnam wood
"Do come to Dunsinane;" and now a wood
Comes toward Dunsinane.—Arm, arm and out!—
If this which he avouches does appear,
There is no flying hence nor tarrying here.
I 'gin to be a-weary of the sun;
And wish th' estate o' the world were now undone.
Act 5. sc. 5.

Still, however, the unaccomplished part of the witches' prophecy leaves him sufficient confidence of success or safety, until he is inextricably involved in that danger which completes his destruction;

They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly,
But, bear-like, I must fight the course.—What's he,
That was not born of woman? Such a one
Am I to fear, or none. Ibid. sc. 7.

With this confidence he engages young Siward;

Thou wast born of woman.—
But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn,
Brandish'd by man that's of a woman born.
Ibid.

And dares Macduff to the conflict:

..... Thou losest labour:
As easy may'st thou the intrenchant air

With thy keen sword impress, as make me bleed;
Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests:
I bear a charmed life, which must not yield
To one of woman born. Act 5. sc. 7.

But he receives that answer, which, removing the reliance placed by him in the prediction of the witches, affords an easy victory to Macduff.

MACD. Despair thy charm;
And let the angel, whom thou still hast serv'd,
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd.
MACB. Accursed be that tongue that tells me so,
For it hath cow'd my better part of man!
And be these juggling fiends no more believ'd,
That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope.—I'll not fight with thee. Ibid.

From this view of the structure of events in "Macbeth" it is perfectly evident, that without encroaching on the natural train of the incidents, more intrigue may be imparted to the fable by the machinery. But while the integrity of the plot is thus preserved without the aid of the higher agency, I am aware, it may be objected, that the latter is rendered either wholly useless, or at best introduced to very little purpose. It is

not to be disputed, that with respect to the advancement of what is properly denominated the action, this is strictly the case: the whole of the preternatural intervention might be removed, without any material danger to this part of the fable. In the tragedy before us, the disclosure made by the witches, might be supposed to have preceded the commencement of the drama by a considerable period; this, indeed, seems to have been requisite in order to render the action perfect in itself. But the charge of being useless and unnecessary does not lie, on this account, against the machinery. When we speak of any, even of the natural incidents, as being of this description, we speak relatively, and with an immediate reference to the contexture of the action, as moulded and embodied by the poet; in this sense many incidents are conceived necessary which are merely arbitrary, which, in fact, we cannot doubt, he might have suppressed altogether, or supplied by others which would seem equally indispensable to the contexture of his subject. With a like latitude must we estimate the utility of that part of the drama which constitutes the machinery; which, though it may not be ne-

cessary in advancing the action, may be strictly so in rounding the subject. The justice of this observation will be more evident, on considering the character of Macbeth, which has been sometimes unjustly condemned as unnatural; as exhibiting too great a degree of irresolution in carrying into effect, a project in which he was encouraged by preternatural intelligences. This is, however, the objection of those only who form but an imperfect notion of the author's scope and subject. The hero's character, as sketched by one who knew it most intimately, is that of being,

> —— not without ambition; but without
> The illness would attend it. What he would highly,
> That he would holily. Act i. sc. 5.

He is in fact represented not only as ambitious, but as superstitious and brave; from the former of these last named qualities proceeded that credulity which disposed him to attend to the witches, and that scrupulousness which withheld him from attempting what they suggested; and from the latter that resolution which enabled him finally to effect his designs, and yet raised proportionable obstacles to the punishment with which

his crime was to be avenged. A mind of this temperament required the operation of powerful stimulants to dispose it to action; to reconcile it to evil in the first instance, and to shake its security in the second. And herein lay the necessity of applying for this purpose to preternatural interference; the influence of which, as directed to such a purpose, I have already fully demonstrated. And let us not forget, here, that it is one thing to engage in an action, and another to raise the suggestions in which an action originates; that the latter is the utmost which is undertaken by the preternatural beings in "Macbeth," who of course diminish nothing of the artful structure of the fable, while they prepare the hero's mind for those impressions, by which he is influenced in a natural manner, and which would have proved unavailing, unless through their interference. True it is, the poet might have wrought out his fable without having recourse to such assistance; but it is not to be disputed, that those beings are still necessary in the only proper sense of this term; in being essential to the poet's plot, as he has found it expedient to constitute it. When from this partial view of the subject, we